

## First Opinion: Repurposing Pandora's Box: A Commentary on the Nature-Nurture Cycle of Sustainability

Turnbull, Victoria. *Pandora*. Clarion Books, 2017.

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A highly engaging and evocative picture is often reflected through readers' eagerness to enter the book at first glance, their anticipation of the page turn, their desire to dwell on text-image interplay, and their lingering thoughts about what they have just read for minutes, if not days. All of these experiences are certain to occur when reading Victoria Turnbull's most recent publication, *Pandora*. This modern-day fable offers a visually stunning commentary on environmental consciousness and activism through the lens of sustainability.

Turnbull's simple, direct text and pace-setting vignettes and panels help convey the destructive force of consumerism and consumption, as well as the connectivity between psychosocial and environmental renewal. Pandora, a female fox, lives among a wasteland of "broken things"—never-ending mounds of discarded items engulf Pandora and her surroundings. Detailed, multilayered illustrations in hues of brown, black, and gray magnify a sense of desolation and perhaps resignation to Pandora's daily routine of "gathering and repairing . . . bringing lost and forgotten things back to life" (Turnbull unpagged). Her efforts to recycle and repurpose seem to be futile among an unchanging landscape of things. Nevertheless, she persists, and with a smile.

The unexpected arrival of an injured bluebird—a symbol of hope, happiness, and transition—shifts Pandora's focused care of inanimate objects to living things, from external to

internal renewal. Pandora's healing of the bluebird in a recycled box enables her to emotionally heal. The two, connected through care, become friends. The bluebird expresses his gratitude for Pandora's assistance through flowers and seeds selected from "faraway lands" (Turnbull unpagged). These gifts of life are planted in the same box the bluebird uses while healing. When the bluebird fails to return one day, Pandora is devastated and fails to recognize the long-term benefits of the bluebird's gifts. As Pandora grieves the departure of her friend, the bluebird's gifts begin to proliferate in Pandora's home and surroundings. Sunlight and song percolate among the natural beauty of the former wasteland. A bluebird, perhaps the original or a descendant, returns and brings joy, comfort, and companionship to Pandora. Thus, cycles of life and friendship are renewed.

This poignant story illustrates the physical and psychosocial components of environmentalism. Cyclical changes, especially those of renewal, require time, patience, faith, and perseverance. As Pandora and the bluebird demonstrate, one must nurture physical and geographical spaces as well as the internal feelings of those who face adversity on a continual basis. Turnbull emphasizes the positive benefits of cyclical change and environmental renewal by starkly contrasting the pastel blue, pink, yellow, and white hues when Pandora and the bluebird are together and the somber hues of brown, black, and gray when they are separated. The strategic creation of circular forms with Pandora and the bluebird (title page, fifth through seventh openings, fourteenth and fifteenth openings, and colophon) and the rectangular shapes, often "boxing" Pandora in or out of society and personal happiness (third and fourth openings, eleventh and twelfth openings), further emphasize the power of and need for internal strength and external support to personally and environmentally thrive. As Alexander Pope once wrote, "Hope springs eternal."

*Pandora* also offers a plethora of intertextual connections and social commentary. One cannot help but see this story as a contemporary extension of the Greek myth, *Pandora's Box*. Hope, the sole comfort in times of misfortune that was left in the box after Pandora's release of evil, is now used by this Pandora to help rid the world of at least two evils: consumerism and consumption. Turnbull also appears to pay homage to Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax* through her illustrations of homes and trees as well as the overarching environmental theme. Those who enjoy Nicola Davies's *The Promise*, where a young girl helps transform her city into a vibrant communal green space through the planting of seeds, will also appreciate the "pay it forward" message here. For movie enthusiasts, *WALL-E* might be a cinematic companion to this storyline. Further, opportunities for dialogue about the construction of gender and engendered behaviors exist and may involve comparisons to Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree*.

In a time where we are increasingly being told that there is no hope left in saving our planet and we are witnessing the rapid erasure of environmental protections, we look to stories like this one to remind us to never give up hope. If we do, we will never hear about the marine scientists who have learned how to regrow coral reefs. We will never hear of new species that have adapted in times of adversity. We will lose our voices of opposition to rampant

commercial exploitation. Without books such as *Pandora*, we will inhabit environmental and psychosocial spaces that fail to flourish. And if we do that, then Pandora's myth might well become reality sooner than we think.

### Works Cited

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### About the Author

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