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Ecocriticism and the Young Adult Audience in Dry and The Islands at the End of the World

Nicole Marie Sysyn

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on exploring and analyzing two young adult novels through an ecocritical lens. The authors of the young adult novels, *Dry* and *The Islands at the End of the Earth*, bring awareness to young readers about the progression of global warming and effects this devastation has on humans and animals. Both of these novels show character's relationships with nature, decision making skills in terms of crisis, and coping mechanisms which can translate to young readers. There is a great balance of teaching young readers the importance of their own relationship with the environment and how to cope in times of environmental crisis. Characters in both young adult texts learn to navigate a new norm and find ways to cope in everyday life after environmental ruin to their communities. The characters in both texts work to create a new sense of normalcy as a way to handle the environmental situation. This thesis offers coping strategies for young adult readers while also informing them of their relationship with the environment. This thesis also analyzes *Dry* through a Marxist lens due to the differing class status of characters and explores the ways in which characters react to climate change and crisis. With many young adult character's perspectives throughout the novel, class status plays a major role in the character's relationships with nature and class whereas *The Islands at the End of the Earth* is only written through one point of view. Through young adult novels, pre-teens and teens can make changes to better their relationships with the environment and slow the progression of global warming due to influences in the ecocritical texts and young adult characters.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Marxism, global warming, environment

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Ecocriticism and the Young Adult Audience in *Dry* and *The Islands at the End of the World*

by

Nicole Marie Sysyn

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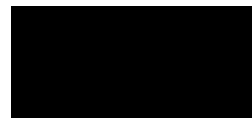
Dr. Laura Nicosia

Thesis Sponsor



Dr. Melinda Knight

Committee Member



Dr. Adam Rzepka

Committee Member

ECOCRITICISM AND THE YOUNG ADULT AUDIENCE IN *DRY* AND *THE ISLANDS AT
THE END OF THE EARTH*

A THESIS

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Nicole Marie Sysyn

Montclair State University

Montclair, NJ

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1. Introduction

In the twenty-first century, global warming and climate change are controversial topics for debate and discussion among individuals, communities, and governments at large. Many want to ignore global warming and reject the notion that global warming continues to increase, but that is not the example to set for the young adult audience. In the twenty first-century, now more than ever, is the time to make a change to better the humanities with the environments and slow the progression of global warming in our own homes and communities. As a society, we should connect with and target the young adult audience to help them recognize their roles in fighting climate change. With global warming continuing to increase, more authors are writing through an ecocritical lens to show the effects, damage, and devastation of global warming and the destruction of weather-related incidents.

Authors choose to target a young adult audience since they are the future. Young adults are at an age where they can make more mindful decisions for themselves and the environment, so aiming ecocritical texts towards this audience has more benefits than not. Young climate activists take a stand and try to reach a younger audience, since young adults are the future of society. Young activists like Greta Thunberg try to reach a younger audience by taking a stand on climate change. By doing so in the public eye, young activists bring awareness to global warming and its increase with social media posts and interviews. In order to reduce the effects of flying, Thunberg built her own boat to travel to the United States. Thunberg gears her message towards young adults to create changes now.

The ecocritical lens brings awareness to one's relationship with nature and the environment. Through the ecocritical lens, one considers one's actions based on the environment and views one's relationship with nature when making decisions and living out daily lifestyles.

Lynn Ross-Bryant defines ecocriticism as “aware of both the need to find new ways to articulate the relations between land and people . . . and the pressing concern for the consequences our ways of imagining are having on the world” (38). Ecocriticism allows readers to view characters’ relationships with land, people, and the environment, as well as the consequences their actions have on the environment. Viewing characters’ consequences and actions and reading about the cause of weather-related incidents allows the reader to observe their own relationship with nature in order to prevent the environmental crisis in the twenty-first century. This lens allows readers to make changes in their own lives that will positively affect their relationship with the environment and slow the progression of global rising before it is too late for the American society.

Dry by Neal and Jarrod Shusterman (2018) follows the lives of various main characters at a young adult age dealing with the effects of the drought in California. This novel does more than just teach young readers to conserve their water. *Dry* shows the devastating effects that the drought has on characters both physically and mentally, their reactions in times of crisis, and shows the effects the drought has on the environment through the ecocritical lens. While it is a very plot-driven and action-based novel, young adult readers also learn about the effects of global warming, the drought, and how characters need to survive without a water source. It brings attention to those people and to the environment attempting to live and survive without a secure water source, something many readers take for granted daily.

This book reads more than just a survival novel; young adult readers are introduced to real-world problems in terms of global warming and how the drought affects and reflects one’s class and economic status. While American society is well aware of class statuses, *Dry* examines how characters from different classes react to and treat the environmental crisis. This novel can

be read through an ecocritical lens as well as through a Marxist lens to examine the mindset of characters of different classes during the drought (called the Tap Out in the novel). The effects of global warming and real world, familiar problems such as class status issues allow the young adult reader to make positive changes to slow the progression of global warming. Authors can connect with young adults through their characters and real-world problems in order to convey the consequences of global warming.

The Islands at the End of the World by Austin Aslan (2014) follows the perspective of Leilani, the main character, only. Even though this novel was published before *Dry* by Neal and Jarrod Shusterman (2018), the young adult audience may be able to connect more with the technological aspect of the book. This novel follows the lives of Leilani and her father as they try to return to their island in Hawaii after a tsunami and the electrical outages that follow it. Readers can also connect with Leilani and her difficulties in terms of technology. Again, this novel reads as an ecocritical text and shows the damage that the tsunami has on people and animal life, but authors can connect with the young adult audience through the inclusion of technologies in their books and plot. If Leilani cannot text or connect with family and loved ones over the phone and computer, this sense of disconnectedness may resonate with young adult readers to make changes in their habits with the environment in order to deescalate the rise of global warming and prepare in case of electrical outages. *The Islands at the End of the World* brings awareness of animal life, habitats, and people surviving on bare necessities and trying to survive off the land. This text brings awareness to one's relationship with nature and how animals survive and sometimes thrive in their natural environments. Young adults may connect to the novel through its uses of technology as a theme, which allows the reader to understand the

seriousness of global warming and the damage it has and will continue to have on our environment.

This thesis will examine two texts, *Dry* and *The Islands at the End of the Earth*, through an ecocritical lens. This project will examine the main characters' relationships with nature, explore how characters react in times of climate crisis, and analyze how authors can connect to a young adult audience using recent facts and statistics from the twenty first century's global warming issues. Through the ecocritical lens, this thesis will also analyze character's coping skills in times of crisis and how characters in both novels navigate a new way to live after environmental ruin. This project will also examine *Dry* through a Marxist lens due to the differing class status of characters. Neal and Jarrod Shusterman wrote *Dry* through many characters' perspectives. The differing perspectives allows readers to view social class and class status in terms of how characters deal and cope with the environmental crisis. Both texts will explore the main character's relationship with the environment, animals, and habitats, along with young adult reader's own relationship with the environment. Both texts will examine how characters cope with a new sense of normalcy and how environmental crisis affects their everyday life.

2. Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism has been explored in literature for decades, but applies greatly to the twenty first century in the time of global warming and the climate change crisis. Cheryll Glotfelty defines ecocriticism as, "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment . . . ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies" (xviii). By examining literature through an "earth-centered approach," scholars analyze how novels represent and treat the environment.

Ecocriticism also explores the role and impact the environment has in novels in relation to how the characters treat the environment. The characters in young adult novels, mimic the actions of humans and their relationship with the environment. Authors use real-life examples in their novels to connect with their audience and show readers the negative effects our actions have on climate change and the destruction of the environment. In her introduction, Glotfelty cautions each generation and one's actions, "Most ecocritical work shares a common motivation: the troubling awareness that we have reached the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet's basic life support systems" (xx). The introduction serves as a cry for help or a call to action to bring awareness to environmental changes and the damaging effects of our decisions on the environment. Glotfelty urges all generations to notice how our actions damage the environment and planet and to make a change. The purpose of studying ecocriticism is not to scare the reader, but rather to reflect on one's own actions and to make changes that positively affect the environment.

By catering to a young adult audience, authors have the ability to reach young readers so they can make positive changes at a young, developmental age and continue these progressions through adulthood. Glotfelty's advice heeds warning to her readers: "Either we change our ways or we face global catastrophe, destroying much beauty and exterminating countless fellow species in our headlong race to apocalypse" (xx). If people refuse to change their ways and their relationship with the environment, the ecosystem will not survive the damaging effects. Our actions will cause the destruction of the environment, the ecosystem, and plant and animal species unless we start to make a change. Authors reaching a young adult audience through their ecocritical writing is crucial and necessary to make positive changes in bettering young adults' relationships with nature and the environment.

While ecocriticism explores the impact of people on the environment, society and culture also appear in ecocritical texts. Often, the culture or economic class of a group of people affect the way they treat the environment. In the novel *Dry*, class affects the way the characters respond and react to the climate crisis. While some characters in the novel view this climate crisis as a life or death situation, other characters exploit their resources to monopolize the situation.

3. Authors Reach a Young Adult Audience

In the novels, ecocritical literature explores ways the environment is impacted by global warming and the effects of characters and their efforts. Choosing to target two ecocritical texts towards the young adult genre opens up this approach to a younger audience. Young adult texts with an ecocritical approach foreshadow events to come in the future. Lykke Guanio-Uluru's "Education for Sustainability: Developing Ecocritical Literature Circles in the Student Teacher Classroom" explores strategies and ideas to promote sustainability and environmental awareness within the classroom. By using a younger audience of ages twelve to eighteen, these texts can teach young adults to value the environment and even practice sustainability tactics to prevent global warming (Guanio-Uluru 7). Since the younger generation is the world's future, ecocritical young adult novels are used as a teaching method. In schools across the globe, student-teachers are conducting research methods for incorporating the best practices for teaching ecocritical texts to students (Guanio-Uluru 7). Schools are choosing to use literature circles as "an effective way to combine cooperative learning, independent reading, and quality group discussion. The approach has been adapted to improve vocabulary in content courses and to focus on science material in novels" (Guanio-Uluru 8). Educators are finding an outlet for their students to discuss real-world, environmental issues in the classroom to influence their futures. Schools are choosing independent reading books geared towards the ecocritical lens, bringing light to environment

issues throughout the world and providing students an outlet to change the outcome of global warming's future. Young adult characters being the main characters in each novel makes the characters more relatable to young adults in school. Guanio-Uluru agrees that ecocritical texts contribute to the students' behavior; "Literature presents the reader with constructed environments and actions . . . specifically shaped in order to socialise children and young adults into ways of being and behaving" (7). The adult authors want to shape young adult readers relationships with the environment, which can be useful when the main character is of the same age and expresses these behaviors in ecocritical literature. If students feel they can relate to the young adult character, they can also be influenced by the character's actions and make a change in the environment.

A common theme or topic geared towards young adult readers is the recurring theme of identity. Some young adult readers may gravitate towards reading a book about identity rather than an ecocritical text about the environment. Patrick Murphy's article, "The Procession of Identity and Ecology in Contemporary Literature," explores adolescents' identity in relation to ecocriticism in modern novels. Murphy incorporates both popular topics in his article to reach the young adult audience. On this topic, Murphy believes, "Novels and popular narrative nonfiction about climate change, for instance, provide signals that contain significant amounts of factual information carried by plot lines that enable the nonspecialist reader to gain sufficient insights to see the need for change and to gain glimpses" (88). Murphy argues that in ecocritical young adult texts, the readers appreciate the plot driven material, but are also receiving new knowledge and information on the climate and environment. By reading an ecocritical, plot-driven novel, such as both *Dry* and *The Islands at the End of the Earth*, young adult readers can see through the eyes of the main character how our actions towards the climate crisis need to

change. Young readers can shape their identities and choices based on reading these books, learning about the environment, and learning about the way we treat the environment. Young adult readers can better their relationship with the environment and how they treat it by making connections with the main character and learning about the climate crisis.

4. *Dry* by Neal and Jarrod Shusterman through an Ecocritical Lens

Dry cautions young adult readers about the effects of global warming, specifically a drought and lack of water, and how this crisis affects one's day to day needs. While this plot-based book begins with a minor inconvenience of conserving one's water and not using too much at one time before showcasing the drastic effects the drought has on people, their actions, and the environment, Neal and Jarrod Shusterman use the minor inconveniences at the beginning of the novel to foreshadow the effects lack of water has on the characters as the drought progresses. Shusterman and Shusterman's opening lines in the novel state, "The kitchen faucet makes the most bizarre sounds. It coughs and wheezes like it's gone asthmatic. It gurgles like someone drowning. It spits once, and then goes silent" (3). Shusterman and Shusterman personifies the kitchen faucet to show the effects the lack of water has on people. The authors foreshadow and compare the kitchen sink to a person. The coughing, wheezing, and gurgling of the sink foreshadows the actions of a person who is not receiving enough water because of the drought. Neal and Jarrod Shusterman's prediction of people coughing, wheezing, and gurgling like the sink comes true in "Part 2: Three Days to Animal."

The effects of the drought turn characters animalistic. When Alyssa age sixteen, her brother, Garrett age ten, and their neighbor, Kelton age thirteen, attempt to find their parents at the desalination rig, the characters fear the danger they put themselves into. Alyssa, Garret, and Kelton watch as others attack their neighbors over hoarding water and steal water and cars from

people they suspect have a water supply. When Alyssa tries standing up for a man who has been beaten over half of a filled water bottle, she sees other characters turn animalistic over the lack of water. When another character, Dalton, who has been beating and attacking others over water, notices Alyssa sweating, the authors observe that, “His unnerving blue eyes dart back and forth across my face, and his cracked lips peel into a truly terrible grin. Deranged and dangerous” (115). Dalton’s relationship with the environment mirrors his relationship with other people: he treats both with violence and without thinking about consequences. Alyssa’s observation that he views her in a “deranged and dangerous” way implies he would treat the environment the same (115). He views Alyssa in an animalistic way or as if she is his prey. He will do anything at any cost to get water, even if it means using violence and preying on other people that have water. Like the coughing and wheezing that Shusterman and Shusterman used in the opening lines of *Dry*, the authors write of the “cracked lips” of Dalton to show the effects of the drought on this character. Since Dalton notices Alyssa has a bead of sweat, he predicts she has a water source and wants to attack her because of this information. Neal and Jarrod Shusterman use violent terminology to show Dalton’s actions as a result of not having any water to drink by using the words “deranged” and “dangerous.” These words echo Glotfelty’s advice about making changes to our relationship with the environment: “we face global catastrophe, destroying much beauty and exterminating countless fellow species in our headlong race to apocalypse” (xx). These animalistic qualities that Shusterman and Shusterman describe about Dalton’s character relate to Glotfelty’s sense of “apocalypse.” Also similar to Glotfelty’s response, the characters in *Dry* experience firsthand a global catastrophe that mimics an apocalypse. They act out of character and become animalistic as a result of not consuming enough water.

In an effort to stock up on water for the drought, Alyssa, Garrett, and their uncle, Basil, shop at Costco for the essentials. After discovering that Costco is not in its usual state (the grocery store is packed, there is little parking, and items are out of stock) Alyssa also notices that people are acting in an unusual state. People act selfishly and greedy and do not want to help anyone else during the climate crisis. When Alyssa finds there is no more water for sale, she decides to check the frozen section for bagged ice to bring back to her family. When she finds a supply of ice, she mistakes a stranger's kindness for deceit. A bystander comments, "That's quite the load there," he says. 'Looks like you could use some help.' He doesn't wait for us to answer before grabbing the cart's handle" when he notices Alyssa struggling to push the cart of ice (Shusterman and Shusterman 14). Alyssa mistakes this bystander's deceit as kindness and lets him push her cart of ice to the checkout line. When she acts of out kindness and wants to repay the bystander for helping by giving him a bag of ice, the bystander deceives her and her brother and wants to take the entire cart and give them one bag of ice in return. The drought and lack of water supply allow one to act out of the norm, take advantage of people, and steal when one may not act this way in normal circumstances. Alyssa notices people acting selfishly and not sharing the water supply with other shoppers as a result of being desperate for water. People take advantage of others, especially children and young teens, because the drought makes them act out of the norm and they think they can get away with it. The drought shows the desperation people feel in the climate crisis.

People are not the only ones suffering from the drought in California. The trees suffer greatly from the lack of water and are the first obvious sign that the drought affects nature, not just dehydrates the characters. Alyssa comments on her uncle's almond farm and explains that that was the first business to wither because of the drought. Because of the actions and lack of

rationing water in *Dry*, the almond trees wither and die. She explains, “But almond trees use more water than almost everything – and with rationing set so low, the almond farms failed first. He declared bankruptcy, let the bank take the farm” (Shusterman and Shusterman 193). The drought not only affected her uncle’s business, but nature and trees, as well. Without water, the trees cannot produce almonds, which can be used for other businesses and in oils. The withering of the trees affects their ability to grow and produce, and represents the withering of her uncle’s company. The ecocritical lens brings awareness to the readers that the lack of water does not only impact characters’ survival, but survival of trees and nature, too. Because of the drought and the trees dying, Alyssa’s uncle has to declare bankruptcy and his business is one of the first to fail or become more greatly impacted than other businesses. Other businesses attempt to function while water was scarce, but almond trees cannot survive on a scarce amount of water.

Alyssa compares the dead almond trees to people’s front lawns. She later comments, “Although the community greenbelts are still alive, people’s lawns look like the lawns in our neighborhood. Some are just plain dead. Brown grass and leafless trees” (Shusterman and Shusterman 194). While the brown grass and dying greenery in people’s yards are not easy to look at, the “leafless trees” and dead trees cause more problems not just in the environment, but for humans, too. Societies need trees to produce oxygen and help maintain wildlife. With the drought affecting the trees by both authors describing them as “dying” and “leafless” this seemingly small observation, later leads to larger problems if the drought continues. The trees won’t just appear dead, they will also affect the living creatures in wildlife by impacting their home and ability to live. Animals and wildlife will not have water to survive on because of the environmental crisis, but the drought also affects their habitat and living space in nature. The

ecocritical lens is crucial for understanding how the climate crisis affects animals, wildlife, and nature, which all impacts humans and our ability to survive.

Ecocriticism also explains one's identity in terms of nature. Patrick Murphy's article explores one's own identity in relation to nature. Murphy writes, "The flesh of our own body is not inhabited by us alone. Rather, we are an ecosystem and a veritable planet for numerous organisms that rely on us for life and on which we rely for life and health" (85). Murphy's explanation relates to Alyssa, and other characters in *Dry*, and the trees she observes in a wealthier neighborhood. While Alyssa only makes an observation about the trees dying and grass appearing brown and leafless, she should think in terms of herself as a separate ecosystem from the environment. In this moment, Alyssa does not fully acknowledge "organisms [the trees] that ... rely on us for life and on which we rely for life and health" (Murphy 85). The trees rely on the characters for life, much like Alyssa and her brother rely on the trees and ecosystem for life and health (Murphy 85). While this small moment seems like a similarity between Alyssa's front yard in comparison to a wealthier neighborhood's yard, it is more sinister than expected and even acts as an example of foreshadowing. Alyssa does not realize at this moment how much she relies on the environment for life and health until the drought progresses to much more difficult times.

5. *Dry* through a Marxist Lens

In "Marxism and Ecocriticism," Lance Newman notes people's relationships with the environment and capitalism. Newman writes that, "'Capitalist' is finally a matter of materialist description—description not of an ideology of growth, or a culture of greed, but of an historically specific, and quite recent, regime of laws of property, methods of finance, distributions of power and wealth" (12). Newman explains that the term capitalist takes on a

materialistic, or money centered approach, which ties in with power and wealth. This ideology of power and wealth blurs and mixes with the ecology and environmental needs. Newman further explains, “Access, not only to the products of modern industry, but also to such things as clean air, water, and food, is sharply stratified by class” (13). People of a higher class have easier and more access to everyday needs such as food, water, and clean air. Class status absolutely plays a role in *Dry* when the characters meet Henry. While Henry should be rationing his water supply in order to survive, he would rather see this excess water as a mode for a money-making business. Because of his high-class status, he has access to cases of water while others around him suffer and sell items for even a few sips of water. Henry uses people suffering at their lowest point as a manipulation tactic to trade them water in exchange for items he wants. Instead of rationing water for himself or helping the community, he uses their dehydration and suffering to his advantage. Henry observes one of his customers “looking weak. Feverish. A lot of people have been that way. I think it’s a little bit more than dehydration” (Shusterman and Shusterman 187). Henry can tell Spencer is dehydrated and sick and uses this as a way to obtain Spencer’s signed jersey in exchange for water. Because he has more access to water due to his class status than the rest of the community, he uses this environmental crisis to exploit “distributions of power and wealth” (Newman 12). Henry asserts his power over individuals because he is the only one in the community advertising that he has access to clean drinking water. Newman explains how profit overpowers human needs by stating, “Human reason over nature serves above all to obscure that we live in a specifically capitalist society and that, therefore, the current mode of human interaction with nature is organized for profit, not for human needs” (13). Henry follows this thinking to his core. He sees water as a commodity, not a basic human resource for daily survival. He capitalizes on his wealth in times of crisis and would rather be known in the

community as powerful than nothing at all. Newman's explanation that humans need to interact with nature is to create a profit fits the description of Henry's character (13). Henry thinks in terms of his high-class, capitalist society, rather than preparing for a drought that personally affects him and his family. His interaction with nature is solely to make a profit and barter goods from his neighbors to benefit himself. The Marxist lens prevails over the ecocritical lens in Henry's case, as he would rather capitalize on his neighbor's suffering and make a profit during the climate crisis. Class status, power, wealth, and greed mean more to Henry than surviving a drought.

Henry's high-class status is shown in the novel when first meeting him and the description of his family's house. Henry describes his family home as "'a house near the top of the hill.' 'It's one of the biggest in the community, with a panoramic view, presiding over the golf course and most every other house that shares our zip code'" (Shusterman and Shusterman 185). Henry constantly describes his house and his house's location as at "the top," reflecting the status of his family as being wealthy. While other characters in *Dry* panic during the drought, Henry views the environmental crisis as a business opportunity and a way to contribute to his wealth. The repetition of the words "top of the hill," "taller," and "higher" to describe Henry's house and the location of his house represent the high class of the community (Shusterman and Shusterman 186-187). Locating the wealthy family and community at the top of a hill in California shows they are at the top of the social class, as being the wealthy class. Locating the wealthy class at the top of the hill also shows they are a top priority. Newman explains that having access to bare necessities and clean water does affect the social classes. He writes, "Access, not only to the products of modern industry, but also to things such as clean air, water, and food, is sharply stratified by class and, within class, by race and gender" (13). Items needed

for everyday survival such as clean air, water, and food affect the social classes differently (Newman 13). Because Henry is of a high social class, his community has access to water during the drought for longer than people in Alyssa's working-middle class neighborhood. Two water tanks inhabit Henry's community, rather than one water tank in the working-middle class communities. One of the older water tanks was reconnected to provide the wealthy class with more water during the drought. Another option is made available to the members of the wealthy class in this community while Alyssa and her brother look for water on the streets and in abandoned cars.

The characters in *Dry* experience firsthand the effects of the drought in California. When Alyssa's parents leave her and her brother alone to find desalination rigs for a clean water source, Alyssa takes matters into her own hands. Awaiting the return of her parents, Alyssa thinks the best solution is to find water for her and her brother Garrett. As the siblings begin their journey for water in the environmental crisis, Alyssa and Garrett acquaint themselves with Henry. Henry's perspective towards the water crisis is to "capitalize in times of crisis" (Shusterman and Shusterman 186). Having a supply of water from his mother's failed pyramid scheme business, Henry decides to make a profit and charge the people in his community a high price for water.

The clash between the wealthy class and the middle class becomes apparent when chaos breaks out in the communities and houses and businesses fail due to the lack of water. The main priority during the "Tap-Out," the drought and water crisis in California in which characters need to limit their water intake, is to find water to survive. The characters in the middle class, like Alyssa, Garrett, and Kelton, pay attention to details and the way the drought affects everyday life, while Henry, the wealthy class, turns a blind eye to the declining environment around him.

Alyssa's lifestyle and her family's social status mold her to be proactive and hands-on during times of crisis. Given the drought and lack of energy from dehydration, Alyssa tries to fix each scenario and sees the way the drought affects everyone's everyday life style. While everyone's concern is the search for water, Alyssa also tries to repair everyday needs that have been affected by the drought to make the crisis more "normal." Alyssa is seen "trying to siphon water out of their irrigation system ... we think sewer gas is backing up into our house because of the lack of water" (Shusterman and Shusterman 50). Alyssa attempts to create a water source for the family and maintain repairs around the house for a sense of normalcy. If Alyssa cannot find the desalination rigs or ration water for the family, she attempts to fix household items and create a new source of water, showing she pays attention to the details of the environmental crisis. The perspectives towards the Tap-Out show the differences between how classes view the environmental crisis.

While Alyssa perseveres and looks for solutions, Henry is more self-absorbed and only looks for solutions that will benefit him. Henry comments on the toll the drought takes on people and, on the destruction outside, but contemplates ways he can use this crisis to his advantage. Henry comments on his neighbor's appearance as "I notice his slow, irresolute movements as he walks . . . he's looking weak" (Shusterman and Shusterman 187). Instead of feeling sympathetic for his neighbor and wanting to help people in need, he uses their weakness and dehydration to his advantage. He bribes his neighbors and other people in the community with water in exchange for their most valuable possessions. Henry's mindset towards the Tap-Out is like the gated community he lives in; since there is a barrier between his community and the chaos on the streets, Henry blocks out the environmental crisis and lives inside the gated community in his head. He creates a barrier between his community and the chaos surrounding him, which

contributes to his self-absorbed mindset. He stays within his gated community and ignores the destruction caused by the drought and the toll it takes on other characters.

When Alyssa and Garrett take him outside the comforts of his gated community, the only comments Henry makes towards the environmental destruction is that he is surprised someone in an affluent community would act barbaric and destroy houses and cars. As he drives through his high-class community, Henry thinks, “It’s one thing to see rioting on TV in dense urban areas that are more prone to social conflagration, but quite a different thing to see homes with broken windows in an upscale community like Dove Canyon” (Shusterman and Shusterman 215). Henry chooses to compare broken windows in his affluent community to riots in urban areas due to the clash he exhibits between middle and high social classes.

He thinks a broken window is comparable to a violent act or a riot, which shows how far removed he is from any social class besides the high-class community he inhabits. He shows shock and confusion towards the destruction and wonders why anyone would act this way in an affluent community. Henry thinks about social class in terms of Marx’s theories about location. David Camfield’s “Re-orienting Class Analysis: Working Classes as Historical Formations” comments on these theories such as location and states, “sociology of class has drifted into treating class as a location, in conformity with the dominant conceptions in the discipline” (423). Henry bases his class status solely on the location of his community. Henry believes a major factor of his social class comes from his house’s location and neglects his family’s income and job status. By basing his social class on location, Henry believes his community will be the first in the area to be granted water and restoration from the drought. He does not panic in this life or death situation because he believes the government will help those of a higher status and the gated community before those in need. As young adult ecocritical texts grow, “Authors of such

fictions not only identify social and political issues of environmental injustice that dominate the popular imagination, but also confront societal ignorance” (Hammer 35). Henry embodies Hammer’s argument about “societal ignorance” by choosing to ignore the drought’s destruction around him. Henry has a supply of water, so he ignores the environmental crisis since it does not negatively affect him. His ignorance of the crisis enables his selfish behaviors and his desire to make a profit from suffering people.

Global warming and climate crisis absolutely have an effect on social classes, not just on a singular person or one specific group. Authors can show the effects of global warming and the climate crisis through the perspective of the main character, but should also inform the reader on how global warming affects the state, government, or the world. Clare Echterling’s “How to Save the World and Other Lessons from Children’s Environmental Literature” places an emphasis on children’s literature feeling real and focusing on all hardships on the community and government rather than just the character alone. For students and young adult readers to fully understand the effects of global warming, authors need to be honest and include all problems in the environment, not just problems the main character faces. Echterling argues, “People of color and poor communities shoulder a disproportionate amount of the world’s environmental problems, but most children’s books gloss over class, racial, and national differences in favor of “one-world” multicultural imagery” (290). In order for young adult readers to grasp the destruction of global warming, novels and literature should include marginalized communities and oppressed classes as they face the environmental crisis from another perspective.

Echterling wants to show that climate change affects all of us differently, not equally (290). Fortunately, both ecocritical texts show the destruction and aftermath of the weather and climate change and its effect on all classes, not just the middle class. Alyssa observes the contrast

between her mindset towards the drought and Henry's mindset, and Leilani in *The Islands at the End of the World* observes how the natives in Hawaii react towards the tsunami and lack of resources versus the visiting tourists or people of mixed backgrounds. In order to produce a successful ecocritical text, Echterling argues, "It is extremely important that our texts teach children that their individual actions matter, but only when green habits are presented alongside the larger systemic problems that need to be changed before any individual behaviors can make real, lasting differences" (294). Echterling believes that young adult readers will take away the most or truly understand the depth and destruction of the climate when main characters' work together with a government or societal force. Young adult readers will gain more understanding of global warming and the effect it has on the environment when these two forces work together. The differing perspectives, class clashes, and martial law in *Dry* allow the reader to notice the environmental crisis through different characters, their backgrounds, and class status. This novel does not only follow Alyssa's point of view, but the differing perspectives and class backgrounds of each character allows the young adult reader to grasp the complexity and destruction of the drought.

While *The Islands at the End of the World* is solely through Leilani's point of view, this book offers mixed backgrounds and a health impaired character navigating their way home after the effects of the tsunami and electronic outbreak. Neither of the main characters are perfect, both exhibits struggle whether in their family background, class, or health, which helps the reader "make real, lasting differences" (Echterling 294). These main characters' work in accordance with larger, systemic issues in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the climate crisis, the damage, and ways to make a change. This combination of main characters

advocating for a change with the help of the government and society allows the reader to fully grasp their call for help and action towards bettering their relationship with the environment.

6. *The Islands at the End of the World through an Ecocritical Lens*

Taking place in Hawaii and writing through an ecocritical lens, Austin Aslan focuses on various animals during the environmental crisis. While this plot-driven book centers around the destruction from an electrical outbreak and the aftermath of a tsunami and the characters' fight-or-flight response, Aslan continues to explore animals' relationship to the environment. When trying to make it back to Hilo from the Big Island, Leilani and her father notice the bird's strange migratory patterns for this time of year and climate. Noticing the birds, Aslan writes, "We see a giant flock of large birds pass overhead, darkening the orange sky. The flock is very high up, thousands of birds stretched out over miles . . . 'But migratory birds go north to south. That flock's aimed for China, yeah?' . . . 'The Orchid's scrambling more than just circuit boards'" (225). "The Orchid," or the green, glowing mass in the sky, affects not only radiation and technology but also the animals of Hawaii. Because of this disruption to nature, the birds do not know which way to migrate and are in danger from "the Orchid" rather than fleeing to safety. In the same conversation, another character, Akoni, a priest and mentor at the community base, later states, "Not just the birds" (Aslan 225). Akoni implies that other animals' routines, habitats, and migratory patterns will also be disturbed and affected by "the Orchid." Leilani and her father can visibly see how "the Orchid," tsunami, and electrical outage affect the birds because they can view their migratory patterns, but do not know what other damage these events may have caused to other animals that they cannot see. This environmental crisis may start with the birds or other visible animals but will soon affect all wildlife and their natural habitats in Hawaii.

While it is a sad realization, Leilani's father explains to her that other animals will have to adapt to the climate crisis and start again. Leilani's father uses the sea turtle as an example and says, "Over the next hundred-or-so million years, the continents drifted apart, about an inch a year. The turtles went about their business, doing what they used to, what their parents used to do, each generation unaware of the imperceptible change" (234). Her father uses this comparison to show Leilani that over years the continents drift apart, but the sea turtles continue to cross the same path even with the new separation and will continue to follow their same path even in light of the tsunami and electrical outage. While it is not fair that animals and wildlife have to suffer the damage and the cost of an environmental crisis, they will find new ways to adapt and continue with their living habits. If "the Orchid" disrupts their traveling pattern, they will find new ways to cross oceans and continents, just like their ancestors did with the drift between continents. The sea turtles need to find new ways to adapt to changes and crises, which relates to all the animals in Hawaii.

Ross-Bryant's article, "Re-orienting Class Analysis: Working Classes as Historical Formations," examines human interaction with animals in terms of migration and changing lifestyle practices. Ross-Bryant writes, "Animals must adapt to new, unforeseen situations; they must respond with 'insight' a biologist says. Animals who live in packs must work together, sharing and assigning the work load; migrating animals must travel thousands of miles on untried routes" (38). An "unforeseen situation" that migrating animals may need to adapt to or find a new habitat would be weather-related incidents, the climate crisis, and global warming (Ross-Bryant 38). Animals are programmed to adapt to new environments, find new migratory routes, and inhabit new places when their habitat or migratory pattern are threatened due to global warming. Animals migrating together, such as the sea turtles in *The Islands at the End of the*

Earth, work together to find a new route, even if that means migrating in unfamiliar territory.

Animals adapt in times of the climate crisis and find a new normal for their migration and living habits.

The tsunami and electrical outage not only affect one's daily activities, fight-or-flight response among people, but also the animals in the ecosystem. *The Islands at the End of the World* brings awareness to how the climate and one's actions towards the climate affect animals, wildlife, and the ecosystem as a whole. Migratory patterns, habitats, and animal species become affected by the climate, which later affects humans and humans' daily life. While this climate crisis is more out of human's control than in *Dry*, humans can still change their relationship with animals, nature, and the environment for the better.

As in *Dry*, when an environmental crisis breaks out, characters begin to show their true colors and their true motivations. Some characters experience a "flight-or-fight" reaction, while other characters act submissive to martial law. The climate crisis and chaos bring out the animalistic qualities of many characters. Before the islands are forced into martial law and take camp at army bases, Leilani and her father notice early on that people exhibit violent qualities. Leilani comments, "Up ahead, a strip mall with a grocery store swarms with looters . . . Food and clothing and appliances tumble from overstuffed shopping carts, and other people quickly sweep up the items. Almost everyone is armed with sticks, bats, or machetes. Some sport shotguns" (Aslan 87). This scene suggests the calm before the storm and before chaos breaks out into martial law.

At this moment, people are looting stores just because they can. People are stealing clothes, food, and other appliances because they can and in preparation for the environmental crisis, but at this moment it is not necessary. The characters show their animalistic qualities by

carrying weapons, implying that they will hurt, injure, or kill someone for taking an item that they wanted or that was in their shopping cart. When the crisis breaks out, some characters resort to looting, stealing, and harming one another. In this scene Leilani focuses on their faces and facial expressions. She notices a familiar smirk that she compares to her brother when he gets away with something he should not be doing (Aslan 87). Leilani's comparison implies these characters know they should not be stealing and looting, but they are doing it anyway. They are doing it because they can get away with it and blame their actions on the environmental crisis.

Even though *The Islands at the End of the World* (2014) was published before *Dry*, the book reads as more modern and includes technological references young adult readers understand and connect to. The environmental crisis begins when the characters lose cell phone and internet service and view a green satellite cloud that causes the outage. Leilani and her father notice, "Vibrant, yet cloudy and frozen, a hazy green knot dominates a quarter of the night sky" (Aslan 58). This green, hazy cloud disrupts the environmental norm, causing an electrical outbreak throughout the world. Because of this cloud and electronic outbreak, the lives of the characters are disrupted, and chaos ensues.

Being separated from her mother, brother, and grandfather, Leilani feels the uncertainty of the world and her family as much as a young adult reader would. Twenty-first century teens are glued to their phones, so it would be easy to check in with family by sending a simple text or using the Internet to research world news. Leilani feels the weight of not knowing how her family is surviving on a different island because of the electronic outage. She thinks, "Not knowing . . . not being able to find out. A simple text is all it would take. *Click, click* send" (Aslan 66). Young adults are affected deeply because of how dependent they are on their phones. If she cannot physically be with her family, Leilani wishes she could at least text them to check

in. Instead, she is left worrying about her family while she and her father are on another island trying to survive and find their way home. Even with the chaos of the environmental crisis surrounding Hawaii, Aslan incorporates ways for Leilani's character to connect with young adults in the twenty-first century. Aslan connects to the young adult reader through the use of technology such as phones and internet and in everyday experience. By creating Leilani's character to embody similarities of a young adult in the twenty-first century, young adult readers may feel more inclined to follow the ecocritical advice embedded in the novel. By observing Leilani's relationship with nature, other young adult readers may consider their own relationship with nature and be more mindful in their decisions. Through Glotfelty's warning, Leilani brings awareness to the environment and "the consequences of human actions" to show the reader how actions negatively affect the environment (xx).

In a later chapter, Leilani comments, "I find a brush, go to wet my hair, and then stare at the brush. *I need water*. Such a basic thing, just one turn of a knob away . . . Brushing my hair – it's nothing, really. But I finally see that this disaster is going to have consequences I haven't even dreamed of" (Aslan 187). By trying to attempt a simple, everyday task, Leilani realizes the extenuating impacts the disaster of the tsunami and electric outage will cause in the future. Like the characters in *Dry*, water is scarce and not available through a tap, so Leilani cannot carry out basic needs without water and obviously cannot use it to hydrate. Being separated from the rest of her family, Leilani and her father focus on getting home safely and surviving the chaos, but this simple reminder of brushing her hair allows her to realize there will be real consequences and damage to the earth with the outbreak happening around them. Even a small moment such as brushing one's hair allows readers to connect with Leilani. If the young adult audience can connect with her through technology and basic needs, this audience may realize they need to

change their relationship with the environment. By following Leilani's advice and motivation to make changes, the young adult audience can help address climate change and make a positive impact on the environment.

7. Trauma and the Ecocritical Lens in Both Novels

These ecocritical books that target the young adult audience aim to halt or slow down the rising effects of global warming across the United States. Young adult readers can follow tips from the main characters in ecocritical novels, and conduct their own research on how to minimize global warming to make necessary changes that will help the earth in the long term. With recent facts and statistics that show the rate global warming affects the environment, young adult readers can make a change and act in halting the global warming process. Of course, many of these changes need to be first acknowledged and acted upon by the government. The *American Psychologist* offers tips to help young readers understand their role in global warming and changing their habits. According to the *American Psychologist* journal, "Since the late 19th century, the average surface temperature of the earth has increased by about 1.1 °C (2 °F), with most of the increase occurring since the mid-20th century . . . global warming is primarily due to increased amounts of carbon dioxide and other 'greenhouse gases'" (800). The rising temperature of the earth and greenhouse gases contribute to global warming.

Obviously young adults cannot prevent the earth's rising temperature, but if everyone makes small changes to their daily living habits, hopefully they can stop the progression of the rise of global warming. The *American Psychologist* also explains that rising surface temperatures affect the climate through rising sea levels and melting polar ice and increase the severity of storms such as flooding, heat waves, drought, and wildfires (800). Earth's rising temperature is present in both *Dry* and *The Islands at the End of the World*.

While young adult readers may think the drought and aftermath of the tsunami are bad in the novels, if surface temperature continues to rise, these storms may be even worse in reality. The effects of these storms are shown in both novels: people dying, fighting for resources, and suffering physically and mentally. Along with showing statistics of how global warming began to rise more in the twentieth century, the *American Psychologist* also provides the challenges that global warming and these storms have for people both mentally and psychically and on the community. The *American Psychologist* shows that depending on the severity of these storms and the environmental crisis, the impact affects people physically in death and injuries, and also mentally in mental health conditions and anxiety that can lead to aggression and violent acts, or in diseases due to debris or lack of resources from the storms (*American Psychologist* 800).

It can be traumatizing for any young adult to witness death in their lifetime let alone the many deaths Alyssa and Leilani experienced throughout their journey. Seeing people become dehydrated and die from the drought or die from the lack of resources in Hawaii maximizes the severity of the climate crisis. *Dry* starts with conserving one's water, and some houses still have water running from the tap, which seems like more of an inconvenience rather than an environmental crisis. Later, Alyssa, her brother, and other characters realize the severity of the crisis when they see people fighting over water, notice the effects dehydration has on the human body, and watch people die from lack of water and other resources in the community.

Alyssa and Garrett feel the impact of the drought from their lack of water intake, but both characters also have a moment of depression and suicidal thoughts at the end of the novel. The drought not only affects Alyssa and Garrett physically, but also mentally, as well. Before the water arrives, Alyssa's mental health takes a toll and she thinks, "Never in my life have I been so horrified, and yet so happy to be holding a loaded gun. I hide it so Garrett doesn't see . . . 'Do it,

Alyssa, ' He doesn't look at me. He doesn't want to see the gun or me. So I press the muzzle against the space between his ear and eye" (Shusterman and Shusterman 366). Alyssa thinks Garrett only has moments to live before he is overcome with dehydration and wants to kill him first before he suffers. Garrett is the one who says, "Do it, Alyssa" and he agrees with her decision (Shusterman and Shusterman 366). The effects of the drought completely impair both Alyssa and Garrett's mindset. Alyssa experiences thinking that would not be typical of her character if there were not an environmental crisis, and Garrett experiences suicidal thoughts because he knows how bad people are suffering from the drought. Both characters express "mental health conditions, including posttraumatic stress, anxiety, depression ... interpersonal aggression and violence" that the *American Psychologist* argues are common side effects of environmental trauma (800). These cautionary tales show the trauma, destruction, and ruin of not only the environment, but the effect on characters, too, which resonates with young readers and teaches them of the damage of global warming.

While the article "Addressing the Climate Crisis: An Action Plan for Psychologists" informs the reader about the dangers of global warming and the aftermath of environmental and meteorological destruction, it also calls for a change and suggests ways to slow the progress of global warming. The article warns, "Unless major reductions in greenhouse gas emissions are made quickly, by about 2030, the earth's average surface temperature will continue to rise and climate change will intensify, with catastrophic consequences for human health, well-being, and equity" (801). The article predicts that by 2030, effects from global warming and the environmental crisis will have a worse effect on human life than it does currently. Earth's surface temperature needs to stop rising in order to suspend the effects of global warming. Young adult readers can already see catastrophic consequences to human health in both novels. Alyssa,

Garrett, and Kelton in *Dry* view people dehydrating and dying in their neighborhoods and as they travel around California. Dead bodies lying in highways, roads, and neighborhoods have become a new normal as a result of the drought. In both novels, Alyssa and Leilani notice the effect of global warming on one's mental health. Characters act out of the norm and threaten people for food and water, fight and kill people over bare necessities, and act in violence towards other members of the community. These examples already seem drastic and intense, but can worsen if the earth's surface temperature continues to rise.

In order to suspend this rise in heat, the Paris Agreement sets a goal to lower the surface temperature. The article states, "The Paris Agreement, an international treaty adopted in 2015, sets a goal of limiting global warming to below 2 °C and preferably to 1.5 °C. Major shifts in policy, investments, technology, and behavior . . ." (801). In order to shift the rising temperature due to global warming, countries need to cooperate and change their policies, investments, technology, and behavior towards global warming (801). Countries need to work together to make these changes, but people are the root of all change. People can make daily changes as simple as carpooling, recycling, conserving water, using reusable products instead of plastic, etc., which is why aiming ecocritical texts towards the young adult audience is so important. By 2030, young adults will experience the effects of global warming the most, so it is important to educate the youth about the effects of global warming so they can make necessary changes in their living habits.

By following the footsteps and advice of Alyssa and Leilani, young adult readers can learn of the effects of the environmental crisis through someone of their own age and observe how these characters react to the crisis. By starting now, young adults can make a huge, positive difference before 2030, as the article suggests. Adeline Johns-Putra's notes that, "Murphy

suggests that climate change fiction encourages us to move from denial to ‘recognition, acceptance, and the will to act’” (274). By reading ecocritical texts, young adult readers can recognize global warming, accept that global warming has negatively affected our environment, and act to make positive changes and slow the progression of global warming (Johns-Putra 274). Readers need to be educated first before knowing what changes to make that will have a positive and lasting impact. Johns-Putra also mentions that ecocritical texts place an importance of “teaching students about the dangers and complexities of climate change” (274). Both young adult texts teach readers about different climate crises and inform them of the dangers the weather and destructive storms have on the environment. It is important to be informed and educated about the climate crisis so young adult readers can respond and react accordingly.

8. Conclusion

Both texts and recent statistics place an emphasis on slowing the rise of global warming by making changes in our daily lives, communities, and within the government. While *Dry* and *The Islands at the End of the World* work more at a personal level, both texts also offer action from the community and government officials to stop the rise of global warming. Young adult readers can learn from the actions of Alyssa and Leilani, as well as conduct their own research or use statistics to show how global warming rises and what we as a community can do to help slow this progression. By reading *Dry*, the young adult audience not only learns of the importance of conserving water and making changes daily, but also learns about coping skills. When water begins to dwindle and the community loses access to clean drinking water, Alyssa describes the change of people’s reactions from human to animalistic, or violent. Some characters in the novel favor violence over helping their community. Unfortunately, this effect of violence and the fight-or-flight response can happen in the twenty first century, too, if a weather-related incident were

to break out. The *American Psychologist* explains that if global warming were to progress and we were to experience weather related destruction, people's reactions to climate change may be violent or out of character. If global warming progresses, people will experience effects that will not only affect them physically, like dehydrating in case of a drought, but mentally as well. Issues like the environmental crisis and class status allow the young adult reader to connect with the main character and make changes in their own lives. Young adult readers can also connect with characters of mixed backgrounds, health impaired characters, and technology, like Leilani and the islands of Hawaii in *The Islands at the End of the World*. Leilani makes note of how the tsunami and electrical outbreak affect her daily life and simple tasks like brushing her hair with water, sending a text, or brushing her teeth. Sometimes the simplest messages hit home the hardest. Young adult readers can resonate with these simple tasks and in order to avoid this conflict in the future, readers need to heed this warning seriously and make positive changes to their relationships with the environment. Leilani also notices how the tsunami affects animal life. Without animal life, habitats and environments will suffer and will not thrive for humans. A young adult herself, Leilani possesses a mature mindset and grasps these harder concepts, which translate to the young adult audience. Using characters similar in age, showing the devastation and effects of these climate disasters, and showing how global warming affects characters and their loved ones allows the young adult audience to realize global warming has devastating effects and will continue to rise if we do not make a change. These ecocritical texts allow the reader to experience global warming firsthand through the main characters, and hopefully resonate with readers enough to shape the future of global warming positively.

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