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Pollution in *WALL-E* and *Parable of the Sower*

In our society, there is a heavy emphasis on the role of pop culture. As new talent emerges in the entertainment industry, boundaries are being challenged and new faces want to address environmental issues using creative outlets. Utilizing talent and technology, media can be used to suppress climate change and it has the opportunity to bring awareness to such matters. Through books and movies, there are ways for everyone to learn about the environment. Pollution is a popular topic within the climate change genre that can be featured in different contexts, such as *WALL-E* and *Parable of the Sower*.

Much like comedy, horror, and action, the science genre has been an emerging topic for decades. Science fiction, also known to be shortened as sci-fi, deals with imaginative and futuristic concepts from a speculative perspective. It is a commonly used category that continues to be tackled from every angle and can be broken down into subgenres. The abundant types of sci-fi include apocalyptic, natural disasters, alien invasion, and dystopian worlds. “The growing awareness of environmental issues in the real world and the dangers humans could pose through pollution or other harmful behaviors fed into many of these films... As climate change becomes more of a concern for more people, films, TV and science fiction will delve even more into the fears, anxieties, and concerns we have to help us explore the issue. In suggesting the worst that

can happen, science fiction can deliver a very potent warning. It can also inspire people to come up with solutions.” (Accomando, “Pop Culture And Climate”)

An example of a post-apocalyptic film would be *WALL-E*(2008). It is a Pixar animated film rated G that can reach a bigger audience because everyone of all ages can watch this critically acclaimed film. It focuses on important topics such as pollution, advanced technology taking over, and inhabiting someplace else outside of Earth. In the opening scene, it pans over a deserted metropolitan city littered with trash. There is no spot that is clean of debris.

The audience soon meets the last robot on Earth left to pick up humans' man-made destruction. WALL-E is his name, short for Waste Allocation Load Lifter Earth-class, and the film takes place 700 years after Earth was first deemed unlivable. All of the humans have relocated to a cruise ship called the Axiom in space where robots are in charge of everything they do. WALL-E has accustomed to living on his own during the time being and has formed his own personality to be self-reliant. He lives everyday doing the same action of compressing one piece of garbage at a time in hopes of tidying up the planet. One day, he comes across the first sprouting green plant to be found after 700 years.

That plant sends him on a journey of adventure, love, and is a sign deeming Earth inhabitable again for the humans to return to Earth. This sign of life signifies that Earth is able to support humans. Whether they choose to make more environmentally conscious choices is up to them as they have to adapt to their “new” world.

The robots controlling the Axiom ship try to sabotage the humans from returning to Earth because they want to keep their influence and authority over them. As the human captain of the ship does his research of what Earth looked like without pollution taking over, he becomes enamored with how vivacious their life was before having to leave and recognizes their

wrongdoing. Through the power of teamwork, the captain, WALL-E, and his robot friend EVE steer the humans back to Earth. When they arrive in the city, the mayor is shown teaching the children about farming and how they'll be able to grow all kinds of plants.

The last shot that the audience sees is a satellite view of a copious amount of greenery growing and a sustainable Earth. WALL-E is an excellent example of an educational and eye-opening film that brings awareness to how detrimental our decisions can affect our ecosystem, especially to expose younger audiences. Jennifer English analyzes the film's ecological impact in her article, "WALL-E's Rhetoric: An Ecological Sermon from a Strange Preacher":

WALL-E urges its audience to take immediate action to stave off further environmental destruction; the earth could reach a point at which it is hopelessly ruined, and humankind is justified in taking extreme measures to prevent such a fate. WALL-E's combined strategies of the ecological jeremiad and the rhetoric of the irreparable serve to make its environmental message stronger. The ecological jeremiad offers the hope of restoring the earth from current problems it faces, such as global warming and pollution. The rhetoric of the irreparable injects urgency into the message, exhorting the audience to act quickly and strongly—if immediate action is not taken, the redemptive possibility may disappear and the destruction may be permanent. The strategies in use together lead to a call for an immediate return to harmony with earth to stave off further man-made destruction. (English, 18)

An example of pollution occurring in the form of literature would be *Parable of the Sower*(1993) by Octavia Butler. *Parable of the Sower* spans through four years, 2024-2027. The

book is told in the first perspective by Lauren Olamina, a teenager growing up in a gated community in Southern California. Outside of the gates, hooligans pose a threat to those inside. Due to a majority of the population being impoverished, water is seen as a symbol of wealth as environmental spoliation makes it a scarce necessity and those destitute have succumbed to committing crime to survive.

The setting of California is also notoriously known for their droughts and the price of drinkable water has risen to be the same amount as gas prices because water pollution has contaminated much of the water. Laurens family's financial situation is lower-class and they are heavily involved in the religious practices of baptism, despite Lauren not believing in it. She develops her own humanism religion called Earthseed where the main aspects include a “God-is-change belief system”(Butler, 34) and getting her followers to inhabit other planets because Earth is going downhill.

After Lauren’s brother, Keith, got mixed in with the wrong crowd his body is found downtown. Lauren's father, Reverend Olamina, goes missing later on and this seems to be the last straw for Lauren. She flees north with two friends, Harry and Zahra, as refugees hoping to spread her new religion. On their journey, the group picks up other supporters of Earthseed. One of them is an older man named Bankole and he states that he has three hundred acres of land in Northern California, that is now the group’s destination.

When the group arrives at Bankole’s property, Lauren gives the rest of the group a choice: commit to staying there and build a community or move on to other opportunities. Everyone decided to stay and they began growing plants for food. To honor members lost, they hold a funeral where acorns are planted to germinate into an oak tree. Sartaj Ahmad Lone states in her article, “Articulation of Environmental Issues in Octavia Butler's Parable of the Sower”:

Some issues, like water pollution which seem trivial and inconsequential today, are dealt so painstakingly that the importance of water, in the future, as a life determining factor is demonstrated... While concluding it can be said that by underestimating environment pollution as trivial and inconsequential issue would be an inexcusable blunder as it jeopardises the whole human progeny.

Furthermore, Butler through her insightful vision demonstrates that religion can also act as a tool for the welfare and betterment of the society. She creates an innovative idea of planting a tree on the name of deceased one instead of putting the stones on the graves which supersedes the conventional practice prevalent in the society. She posits that “I would like to give them grove of oak tree.... Trees are better than stones—life commemorating life” (326). Actually Butler wants to convey this message to the whole world that instead of putting grave-stone on grave, if people plant a tree on the name of deceased, it can help to mitigate environmental pollution to a great extent, because every year millions of people die, and every year millions of plants can be planted to save the world from environmental disaster. (Lone, 25-26)

The reading level of *Parable of the Sower* is grade 5 and the interest level is grades 9 to 12. Having the same ability as *WALL-E* to reach a younger audience, this could be the adolescents first interaction with media of this caliber addressing environmental affairs. Both of these works can be utilized to educate students in their curriculum and ignite a fire in them to enact change. There is plenty yet to be done with literature and the sci-fi genre in the entertainment industry to spread awareness.

Between the media forms of films and books, *Parable of the Sower* shares similarities with *WALL-E*. Both works depict dystopian and futuristic worlds littered with pollution and severe global warming. *WALL-E* is post-apocalyptic and *Parable of the Sower* is apocalyptic. Earth is struggling to function due to man-made anthropogenic disasters. There is only so much our world can endure and these kinds of work can aid our fight against climate change. Their general themes focus on the importance of agriculture and to be more mindful of our environmental choices.

In the entertainment industry, their main purpose is to create stories that produce amusement. Modern media exaggerates to get a message across with shock and wow factors to garner attention. There are limitations with a blockbuster as professionals have to think of what will succeed in the industry. They make crucial decisions of whether they're willing to push the boundaries or take the safe way out. Nevertheless, post-apocalyptic films can change our perceptions by using art and cinematography to illustrate a potential world depicting our doom if this damaging trend continues. Depending on the validity of content, it can be an enlightening and educational tool for the viewer.

Climate change is no longer a phenomenon studied by scientific experts, but calls for action from all citizens today. A population being scientifically literate can make better decisions in their daily lives to support environmental sustainability. The growing peril of climate change and global warming is a critical, multifaceted issue that affects people from all walks of life. This particularly puts those less financially stable at a disadvantage because they are not able to afford luxuries to protect them, let alone basic necessities. *Parable of the Sower* and *WALL-E* highlight environmental degradation and the destruction of ecosystems resulting in increased severity of humankind's downfall.

As times are becoming more advanced, there are more opportunities to spread awareness about environmental issues. Pop culture can be utilized to educate and bring environmental justice. No matter how elaborate or unrealistic the messages are, spreading the word is the most effective way to make it a concern for citizens. Gardening, farming, and supporting agriculture businesses should be normalized in our society as it reaps many benefits for the planet and the contributors.

WALL-E is a lighthearted rendition showing the everlasting effects of pollution and how harmful it can be if humans choose to continue this destructive behavior. Most trash is not designed to break down for hundreds of years and we can reduce our waste production by learning where our trash ends up and how to audit the process. *Parable of the Sower* gives a harsh reality check of how violence and crime can produce pollution and the role of religion regarding climate change. There is no such thing as bad publicity when it comes to environmental issues, as long as people are becoming aware of the current state.

High brow literature and film can gain the attention of everyone that has the privilege to get access to such sources. The idea of trash production and recycling emerging in different contexts can broaden the viewership and expand the boundaries of climate change. These themes emerge through compelling storyline plots and engaging characters. There are plenty of lessons to take away from *Parable of the Sower* and *WALL-E* such as: how environmental conditions affect people in poverty, the importance of sustainability, and how to engage the youth to be passionate about environmental issues. Sci-fi films and books remind us that we only have one planet while still being entertaining and engaging.

The influence pop culture has on our lives is prolific as we often spend most of our free time indulging in it. Environmental issues and current events are becoming important topics in

our media because climate change proves to be a greater threat at this rising rate. As pollution continues to harm the ozone layer and environmentalists are scrambling to endorse action from citizens, leaders in the entertainment and publishing industry are employing their resources for a meaningful purpose.

WALL-E and *Parable of the Sower* are two examples of well-executed works in the science fiction genre that address climate change and the importance of agriculture to create a greener Earth. Although they are portrayed through two contrasting tones, separate styles, and undergo different conflicts, the overall motifs are similar. Addressing pollution is an emerging topic within climate change that paves a pathway to educate younger generations. As more work continues to be made highlighting environmental issues, there is always something one can do to help this planet.

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