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Loving Your Mother and her Earth

“Love your Mother” is a term coined to promote environmental awareness and appreciation among humans, yet fails to account for the maltreatment that both Mother Earth and human mothers endure. Both of these figures, presumed to provide wholly for their children without expecting gratitude in return, carry the weight of their own destruction in the wake of harboring a life form. A mother’s pregnancy directly mirrors the Earth’s harboring of the human race, or the Anthropocene. The Anthropocene denotes the present state of human advancement and environmental detriment and explains the relationship between humans and their environment amidst their development. Catherine Pierce’s poetry collection, *Danger Days*, equates a firsthand account of motherhood to anthropogenically-induced eco-destruction and the effects on the Earth and a mother’s wellbeing. Pierce connects these two entities to raise awareness about how the Earth is approaching irreversible damage, similar to how a mother is completely changed during and after pregnancy. Her collection encapsulates the compulsion for humans to step up from performative environmental activism and truly make advances to protect the Earth.

The Earth and a mother both exist as gestation chambers for demanding, selfish, growing organisms. The Earth, harboring the human race and its inexorable collateral damage, and a human mother, housing a developing baby, both suffer through “the joy of motherhood” to give life to their successors. Pierce links motherhood with Mother Earth through the role of carrying an entity within oneself. Her poem, “The Mysteries,” touches on the topic of being a peaceful home to internal destruction: carrying a “vast, calm lake” that is “on fire” (Pierce 61). By making peace with the discomfort of pregnancy, Pierce powers through the process and offers a parallel experience for the Earth, as it idly exists in the wake of human-induced catastrophe. Similarly, Catherine Roach’s journal focuses on the parallels between the Earth and a mother, claiming: “the way we think about and treat the environment is related to the way we think about and treat women” (47). Humans have imposed a feminine persona onto the planet to evoke environmental adoration and outshine the blatant demolition they conduct. However, this adoration is not active; it does not make any advances for conservation or protection of the planet from humans, for it merely assigns a personified label to it. Roach also states, “loving the Earth as our mother would not...help us to be more environmentally sound,” supporting the

argument that performative ecological respect does not solve the complex issue of anthropogenic eco-destruction (50). Planet Earth provides for humans and all other life forms: it supplies everything necessary for survival and prosperity, as a human mother does, and the most that the human race can do to give back is to accept it wholly. However, mistreating the Earth can come as easily to humans as mistreating one's mother. By taking nearly everything she provides for granted, one disregards a mother's sacrifices and lessens a mutual relationship to a parasitic one. Humans act as parasites to the Earth because they don't truly give back to it, no matter how many performative acts they conduct. Pierces also offers a romanticized perspective regarding the anthropogenic destruction of the Earth in her poem "Love Poem Planetary Wonders and Loose Definition." Amidst the development of humans and the anthropogenic pollution accompanying it, Pierce admires the remaining natural beauty of the Earth: "darling, here is a sky polluted with our city / kiss me under it" (Pierce 55). The poem effortlessly focuses on enjoying the simplistic, beautiful nature of the world all while humans consistently pollute the natural environment, literally and through their sole presence. By taking advantage of their home planet and the resources it provides for them while mistreating it through pollutive actions, humans provide nothing beneficial to the Earth. Humankind's flagrant degradation of their environment proves them to be leeches to their home planet.

Humans' existential awareness of themselves and their actions is the direct result of catastrophe to an unavoidable degree. Timothy Morton's theory of dark ecology focuses on the Anthropocene as a driving force of global environmental demise and the ecological awareness of humans. Upon their realization of the repercussions emanating from their noxious actions, humans "find out that they are the tragic criminal," and reach a point of "ecological awareness" (Morton 9). Pierce exemplifies several of Timothy Morton's ideas from his dark ecology theory, applying them to mundane, everyday life. Her poem "Quiver" contains a small but monumental moment of realization: "As I notice [the crepe myrtles], I notice / my noticing. My body buzzes" (Pierce 40). Pierce's awareness of her existence perfectly demonstrates Morton's idea, as it sends her spiraling into an existential crisis: "I was molecular, / ionized, I was only / nerves" (48). This plight Pierce presents throughout the collection seems to speak for humans as a whole. This awareness unites humans, similar to how the ecological consequences of their actions accumulate. Each small insignificant action carried out by an individual quickly adds up into a monumentally-impactful amalgamation. For example, a single plastic straw quickly grows into the Great Pacific Garbage Patch when used by virtually seven billion people across the globe, proving that the global accumulation of seemingly negligible human actions has a massive impact on the planet. Alternatively, in a corporate setting, a company's "understanding and action in response to climate change" shifts into a "business decision aimed at improving profitability," rather than a proactive resolution (Nyberg 9). By industrializing the issue of climate change, corporations downplay the severity of the imminent affair in order to gain profit, while their operations are the major contributors to the planet's deterioration. In turn, this performative environmentalism focuses on individual micro-pollution, not global industrial pollution. These companies shift the blame away from their harmful actions to individuals and how their accumulating actions are the sole destructor of the Earth. For example, the Deepwater Horizon disaster in 2010, proved to be BP's responsibility, caused far more damage to the environment than the emission of one car ever would.

The effects of human development and ecological destruction are far from being over. Accumulating anthropogenic consequences wreak havoc on the Earth, and trouble humans, specifically parents, on their thoughts of the future wellbeing of the planet. In her study regarding parental anxiety about the future in the wake of climate change, Sara Ekholm determined “parenthood is...intimately associated with uncertainty about the future and...fear that children” become exposed to dangers- ecological or immediate (1). The study conducted in Sweden concluded that parents tended to worry about climate change and its repercussions more than non-parents due to their responsibility to sponsor their children’s lives in the future. Due to the presence of anxiety about climate change remaining persistent in the participants, this study exemplifies Timothy Morton’s theory regarding humans’ perception of hyper objects. He describes a hyper object as “a massively distributed physical entity” to which humans cannot assign a concrete existence (15). Climate change’s invisible presence has countless cataclysmic consequences, which humans are able to see and stress over, yet do virtually nothing as a species to combat. The future generations will feel these continued results of human-driven ecological ruination to an exponentially greater capacity, prompting the imminent stress that parents experience. In her instructive poem, “Strategies for Mothers in the Age of this Age,” Pierce says “with everything balanced...we know not to test / for tension,” (18-19). She explains the caution exhibited by mothers in everyday life, immersing her reader into the anxieties of parenthood. She mentions “the ‘Gun Free Zone’” signs in her child’s kindergarten classroom, proving how she as a parent must focus on the societal dangers rather than environmental in order to protect her children to the highest degree (18). Because things are balanced on “the thinnest of threads,” any small mistake could set off a domino effect of unwanted occurrences, justifying the caution parents exhibit during their children’s upbringing (Pierce 19).

Catherine Pierce’s *Danger Days* focuses on the struggles of motherhood and climate change, connecting the two processes seamlessly. The collection utilizes ideas from Morton’s dark ecology theory and applies them to both pregnancy and motherhood in a manner comparable to the Earth’s endurance of human development. Morton’s theory provides optimal perspectives on humans’ environmental awareness and performative activism regarding the wellbeing of the planet. The exploitation of mothers and the planet prove to be parallel calamities, if not indistinguishable. Pierce’s poetry presents a sense of urgency, in which she insists that the Earth is heading towards irreversible destruction, and it’s in the hands of truly motivated humans to stop it.

Works Cited

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