

The Impoverished Landscape: Navigating Absence and Ecological Resilience in Speculative Fiction

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Abstract: The impoverished landscape in science fiction is arguably a reflection of the impoverished landscapes of contemporary reality. The increasing effects of climate change and biodiversity loss are reflected in environments that exhibit decreasing resilience to ecological disruption, whether it be the effects of ocean warming on coral reefs, or the transformation of rainforest environments into savannah. Speculative narratives that explore these landscapes, while arguably acting as a warning for possible futures to come, also offer ways by which these landscapes can be navigated. While the impoverished landscape is ultimately a dystopian construct, it is also a place to explore boundaries between the human and nonhuman, and between individuals and communities. Moreover, impoverished landscapes are places of conversation between the living and the dead, where human interactions with landscapes can be interpreted in terms of absence. How do humans relate to

landscape when significant portions of that landscape are gone? And, crucially, how does that impoverished landscape respond to the absence of humans—an absence which may ultimately be beneficial for the remaining community within that landscape? Apocalyptic narratives that engage with the impoverished landscape—narratives such as *Sweet Fruit, Sour Land* (2018) by Rebecca Ley, and *Locust Girl* (2015) by Merlinda Bobis—interrogate the place of humans within that landscape, and frequently reflect, in their characters, the impoverishment of their environment. Human response to the impoverished landscape, these stories argue, is indicative of resilience levels in culture as well as ecology.

Keywords: Impoverished landscape, resilience, dystopia, ecology, resources, community

Landscapes within speculative fiction are a source of opportunity. As in our own world, where landscapes reflect the priorities and

choices of its inhabitants, speculative fiction has the potential to use the environment as a means of expressing individual and community values. Societies that value sustainable and diverse landscapes have very different lifestyles than societies that, through the expression of their values, are engendering degraded and inhospitable landscapes. Dystopian fiction, in particular, is a vehicle for envisaging the realities of this latter presentation. All too frequently, extractive and exploitative practices result in environments that are increasingly incapable of supporting life. Subsequently, influenced as it is by climate change and biodiversity loss, dystopian speculative fiction provides an imaginative approach to navigating our own landscapes in ways that prioritise creativity and reconciliation with the nonhuman. That creative approach is able to re-imagine the impoverished dystopian landscape—stripped as it is of ecology and (increasingly) of meaning—as a place of dynamism and resistance. Such is the case in *Locust Girl: A Lovesong* by Merlinda Bobis (2015) and *Sweet Fruit, Sour Land* by Rebecca Ley (2018).

The two texts discussed within this article may appear fairly distinct from each other, and *Sweet Fruit, Sour Land* and *Locust Girl* certainly take very different approaches to landscape. These differences prove valuable, however, as their diametrically opposing interpretations of theme prove jointly illuminating. *Sweet Fruit, Sour Land* depicts a landscape in the early stages of profound alteration. Ecological collapse and the implied devastation of insect populations has led to a severe food shortage, whilst the inability of existing communities to cope with the drastically reduced resources that are available to them results in mass migration and internal displacements. In the United Kingdom of the novel, the social and political response to this increasingly dystopian environment includes

a rigidly controlled approach to reproduction, and the ability of the central characters Mathilde and Jaminder to navigate their reduced reproductive choices comprises the central concern of the text. Landscape, within this dystopian narrative, is ostensibly a background element, but one which nevertheless looms large in human affairs, and massively narrows the range of future possibility. Crucially, the loss of pollinating insects is likely to lead, over time, to different vegetation patterns both in the wild and in the communities that manage to survive within this increasingly ecologically impoverished environment.

Whereas *Sweet Fruit, Sour Land* makes clear the connection between ecology and landscape in a changing environment, *Locust Girl*, on the other hand, is set in a significantly more fantastic and unfamiliar landscape. It is a landscape so degraded, and so functionally sterile, that further environmental change has become almost impossible. Any regenerative potential must be supported by an outside source that has proven unwilling to provide it. The resultant wasteland environment is part desert, part bone-yard, lacking water, plants, and (most) animals. The only organisms able to exist there are locusts that survive by hibernating deep underground, and humans, who receive limited food and water from a more functional ecosystem across the border; a border they are not permitted to cross, preventing the migration of environmental refugees such as Mathilde and Jaminder. Bobis has produced an almost magical fable, as opposed to Ley's science fictional environmental dystopia, and the contrast becomes most apparent in their differing treatments of insects. The insects of *Sweet Fruit, Sour Land* impact on the landscape primarily through their absence. In *Locust Girl*, however, the nine-year-old protagonist Amedea has a locust embedded in her body; a narrative

choice which blurs the boundaries between human and nonhuman species and might, ultimately, lead to the survival of both.

Although both texts differ in genre, scale, and reproductive concerns—Ley’s novel prioritises individual choice, whereas Bobis’ is more greatly concerned with community capacity—they both figure landscapes as a means of exerting control over an outgroup. Whether that outgroup comprises women or the impoverished inhabitants of desert wastelands, the respective relationships with landscape manifest points of change within each text. Landscape, in both novels, is not merely a reflection of possible sterility and exploitation. It is also a place of resistance, where reproductive abilities and engagements with the nonhuman are able to generate a potential path forward, a path where resilience is returned to the landscape, and to the people that inhabit it. That resilience is two-fold, referring as it does both to ecological resilience—the ability of an ecosystem to recover after disturbance—and to human resilience, which can be perceived in the ability of individuals and communities to exhibit agency and to persist and thrive even under unfavourable conditions. Crucially, human resilience is heavily dependent on ecosystem resilience, as the ability of the latter to reliably provide ecosystem services, such as food and water, is necessary for human populations to survive and flourish.

Sterility and the impoverished landscape

While landscapes comprise more than their ecological components, the influence of ecology on landscapes is vast. Animals and plants significantly alter the geography of a region, an effect evident in either their presence or their absence. That same ecology is susceptible

to undermining, and an impoverished landscape may also be a sterile landscape. Given that ecosystem resilience is correlated with biodiversity, any factor which limits that biodiversity contributes to a vulnerable ecology, and to a landscape on the verge of change. Garry Peterson *et al.* comment, for instance, that the “consequences of species loss may not be immediately visible, but species loss decreases ecological resilience to disturbance or disruption. It produces ecosystems that are more vulnerable to ecological collapse” (1998: 16). Habitat loss, the introduction of monoculture practices in farming and food production, and pollution are all examples of change that can impact upon a landscape, and which can cause biodiversity loss in the ecology that exists within that landscape. Those speculative landscapes that exist within dystopian narratives are typically impoverished in these ways, and the biodiversity loss, subsequent lack of ecological resilience, and the creeping onset of sterility are often illustrated not only within the landscape in question, but also within the inhabitants of that landscape.

It may be instructive here to recall the legend of the Fisher King, whose incapacity through injury is reflected in the barren lands of his kingdom—the comparative democratisation of power exhibited by more contemporary speculative narratives may be indicative of a similar relationship between people and place. If the speculative landscape has become barren, then who is responsible for this inflicted sterility, and how might it be remedied? It is certainly easier to nominate a single figure as the answerable party, as opposed to an economic system, or wider community support of unsustainable lifestyles, but that is a fantasy on more than one level.

The failing landscape of *Sweet Fruit, Sour Land* is very much a series of implied

absences, and barren or sterile biologies are brought into focus via the ongoing struggle for provender. Food is a central concern in the novel's world, imported and rationed out due to failing natural supplies. Jaminder summarises a pressing environmental concern of her society regarding pollination: "Did you know that oats are pollinated by the wind, in the way that fruit is not?" (Ley, 2018: 286). She goes on to state that "I'm sure you could never imagine a place without fruit or vegetables, a place where there is only oats because there is only wind" (286). The apparent decline in insect populations is never really addressed within the text, aside from doomed, vanity attempts by the wealthy to import bees back into the UK, but the absence of pollinators is clearly having a significant effect on horticulture.

Moreover, there are vast swathes of landscape that have, on a global scale, become unfit to support the communities which have been built on them. Mathilde dreams of her former home in France, where she envisions "the land for what was left of it: scorched and tropical, parched and cracked, diseased" (6). It can be no coincidence, really, that Mathilde has somehow transposed the home of her childhood onto her own body. "Sometimes I feel that my body is a desert," she says (187), and correspondingly determines that she, too, will bear no fruit. This is not a decision made in carelessness or haste. It is, in fact, a decision that is likely to see her sanctioned, punished by a state which has mandated the fertility of its women. Mathilde's doctor, concerned that she is advancing in age without having borne a child, makes sure to expose her to the sight of another woman being medically raped in order that she conceives a child. That woman is drugged, strapped to a bed, and trying to scream. Nonetheless, "It's important that you saw that," her doctor tells her. "She was almost

thirty," he says, speaking of the woman being violated in front of them. "Something had to be done" (92).

Although sterility is sweeping over the formerly fertile fields of the land, other natural resources cannot be left to lie fallow; such is the threat. After this traumatic experience fails to increase Mathilde's desire for children, her (voluntary) sterility in the face of the increasingly barren land is perceived by those in power as an implicit reproach to that same land, and an explicit reproach to the body politic that has decided that all women must personify fertility, even if that fertility is failing around them. Unlike *Sweet Fruit, Sour Land's* emphasis on individual experiences of sterility as reflections of wider ecological loss, *Locust Girl* places its sterile landscape at the forefront of the narrative, and minimises characters' engagement with notions of individual reproduction. Arguably, this is a direct result of character choice, as the protagonist of *Locust Girl* is a nine-year-old girl, albeit a nine-year-old whose body has been in the equivalent of suspended animation for ten years; the potential for childbirth is naturally not her primary focus. Little Amedea, however, is clearly unusual, and for more reasons than the locust embedded in her forehead. There are simply very few children in the desert wastelands. Arguably, children provide a more central concern of *Sweet Fruit, Sour Land*, as its landscape has not—quite yet—become so degraded that it is almost impossible to feed them. That day is clearly approaching, however, and hence the mandated reproduction enforced by the government—intended to maintain proof of fertility in the midst of a failing ecosystem—evokes complex, often hostile responses in the characters.

This governmental response to increasing landscape sterility in *Sweet Fruit, Sour Land* is primarily resource-dependent. The novel's

London hosts an elite population of powerful individuals, who have chosen to hoard limited resources at the expense of the rest of society. “Why not save the privileged few that can be saved, why not live in the lap of luxury for your remaining years, if there are ways to do it,” Gloria observes (227). Her sardonic appraisal of the situation is based firmly in an understanding of absence, of sterility and limitation, and how these social determinants are experienced by different people, in different ways, and in different places. As Gloria reveals, parts of Northern Europe are still able to grow their own food, but an influx of refugees to Norway brought disease that devastated its human population. Countries such as the United Kingdom, therefore, who lack sufficient food-producing capacity due to the increasing sterility of their landscapes, are exporting a perceived excess of women in order to bolster Norway’s failing human population: “We get the produce that still grows in that milder part of the world, and they get our best women. Our most fertile. The ones who won’t be missed. The ones who don’t play by the rules. The ones who don’t do their duty, they’re the easiest to give up” (227).

Duty, in this context, is reproductive. It perhaps seems stunningly short-sighted to mandate reproduction within a landscape where the capacity to sustain human populations is rapidly decreasing, but then reproductive coercion, in this novel, is a form of population control that works on multiple levels. “They were the ones with the food, so they were the ones with the power” (8), Mathilde thinks of the remaining farmers—a sentiment that could just as easily apply to the politicians of both texts. In *Locust Girl*, food is rigidly allocated by those same politicians. Most characters inhabit a landscape that is wholly barren, wholly impoverished, with the only sustenance available to them being the meagre rations

periodically provided to them by what passes for a ruling body—albeit a ruling body that exists at a distance, behind a well-guarded border. These rations are insufficient, and the distribution of them is frequently unreliable. After a month when food is not provided, Amedea, her father, and their community are reduced to eating sand porridge and locusts. Amedea’s father gives most of his own portion to his daughter—“I grabbed his bowl and ate his meal, having licked my own bowl clean. I crunched his share of locust, trying to convince myself I’d be full. My father believed little bellies must be treated well” (Bobis, 2015: 4)—but this is an unsustainable solution, and it is clear that the camp is starving. Furthermore, the locusts that they have been able to scavenge from the environment are becoming scarce, “burrowing deep beyond our reach” (5).

Diverse, interconnected food webs are indicative of a healthy environment, but in the barren landscape of *Locust Girl*, the food web no longer resembles a web at all. The humans of the camp consume a single species, because there is nothing else available. This consumption, moreover, is about to be inverted. When the camp is destroyed by bombing, Amedea is the only surviving part of it. Everything else belongs to the flames and to the locusts, who gorge on the charred bodies. Amedea, burnt but alive, has been buried underground; there she sleeps for ten years, trapped with a single locust: “It nibbled at me, thinking I was a stone blocking its way. It nibbled parts of my burnt crust in patches. Then it grew tired. It nibbled its way under my forehead and there slept my ten-year sleep” (9).

When Amedea wakes from her decade of hibernation, her body, covered in burn scars from the bombing, has been altered in one major respect. The locust remains embedded within her forehead, and the two organisms, sharing dreams and songs, subsequently begin to explore

the ruined landscape together. If Mathilde thinks of her body as a desert, and one reflective of the home she left behind, then “Amedea’s locust reorients her embodied subjectivity to become in and of the environment” (Zong, 2020: 100). Neither of them are any longer a consumable commodity for the other; their relationship, now, is one of symbiosis instead of predation. It is this symbiosis which allows Amedea, eventually, to comprehend the wider predation that has resulted in that impoverished landscape in the first place.

The concept of a child who sleeps for ten years, leaving one dystopian landscape in order to enter another, has appeared more than once in recent Australian literature (Bobis is Filipino-Australian). In *The Swan Book* (2013) by the Indigenous Australian author Alexis Wright, a little girl called Oblivia falls asleep inside a gum tree and does not wake for years. Her now-elderly parents do not recognise her, so Oblivia, like Amedea, is forced to make a home and build a community with people she does not know, in a world that is both familiar and unfamiliar to her. This article does not extend to a close reading of *The Swan Book*, but it is mentioned here as a second example in service of my reproductive argument: texts such as *Sweet Fruit*, *Sour Land* that have adult protagonists who are concerned with child-bearing and child-rearing engage with the lives those children might have, predicting the future world that they will inherit. *Locust Girl*, on the other hand, and *The Swan Book* to some extent, use the device of the lengthy sleep to bring that future to an existing child character. This particular strategy increases the sense of dislocation within the narrative, and indeed Amedea, bereft of her father and her community and even, in the early stages of her awakening, her language (Oblivia herself, on awakening, is also mute) is in some sense

thrust into a landscape that is both familiar and alienating at once.

That alienation is deliberate on more than one level. As Amedea navigates the impoverished landscape of her future present, she discovers that the rations given out to the equally impoverished communities beyond the border have been adulterated. To quell discontent with repeated bombings and the periodic, fiery sterilisations of people and landscape, the people inhabiting that dystopian landscape are being made to forget. The seeds distributed as part of their rations encourage amnesia, both of individual and community stories, and erase memories of the fires that keep the landscape sterile. It is felt that a solid understanding of cause and effect, as it specifically pertains to that landscape, would only encourage ‘strays’—refugees who would leave the dystopian lands for the healthier ecologies inhabited by the powerful. “Strays are meant to forget their own stories from once upon a time, for good,” Amedea is told, “So they won’t attempt to walk to the border” (157). Naturally, those orchestrating this constant manipulation via rationing do not eat the contaminated food themselves, because their own memories are perceived as a necessary survival mechanism:

Those are *their* stories, *their* own devastation. All other stories and devastation must be forgotten, like they never happened. But not theirs, no, they never forget their own for good, even if they happened once upon a time. Here, they want only a momentary forgetting for rest. Because they’re fearful that they’ll forget and never remember, so they’ll stop guarding the border, and they’ll be unsafe again. (158)

These relationships between food, body, and landscape in *Locust Girl* are both complex

and corrupted, and the mechanism of that corruption is simplification. Both biologically and in terms of landscape, this simplification, achieved with fire, is an ongoing sterility that undermines ecology, devastates food webs, and impedes both reproduction and ecological resilience. In social terms, this simplification encompasses the destruction of individual and community memory, leaving the people of the wasted lands functionally incapable of improving their conditions or their landscape. It also, as Dolores Herrero comments, separates the privileged inhabitants of sustainable landscapes from their fellow humans who live across borders, and blinds them to “potentially fruitful contact” with the stories of outsiders (2017: 955). This is sterility of another sort which, like that of the landscape, has been engineered in order to reduce the possibility of political opposition.

In line with their provision of ecosystem services such as food and water, landscapes become a manipulated and contested environment due to human interests. This is particularly the case in speculative dystopias, where the control of limited resources is frequently a central narrative concern. This raises a crucial alternate consideration. If a speculative landscape can be manipulated in order to enable existing exploitative relationships within and between communities, is it possible that that same landscape can, even within a dystopia, be used to enable a more equitable and resilient environment?

The dystopian landscape as a site of resistance

Within *Locust Girl*, exploitation centres around the treatment of people as landscape. Both entities are similarly made sterile, and such reproduction as is able to survive in an

impoverished environment (ecological and social) is limited, and unable to either mount, or continue, a sustainable resistance—a resistance which must, in both cases, involve an increase in system resilience. The merger of people and landscape is underlined by the parts of that landscape that are made of human bodies, or of human parts, as with the near-endless fields of bones that Amedea and her companion Beenabe travel through after the former is unearthed from her hibernation: “The sun leapt around what looked like white sticks and balls, hundreds of them, some piled together like kindling,” and many other bones are laid out in a line “matching the length of the horizon” (13). Beenabe discovers that this line marks a border which the dead were not permitted to cross, and there is “half-buried barbed wire running for miles, alongside the line of skulls and bones” (15). To complete this picture of sterility offered by the remains of the dead, this desiccated and sterile landscape is filled with bones that represent the juveniles of more than one species. Amedea picks her way through the skeletons, noting that “my feet were intent on not hurting the skulls and bones, especially the very few little ones. They were curled beside the big ones or the big ones were wrapped around the little ones” (29). The same page depicts her observation of the skeleton of an unnamed animal, also wrapped around the remains of its young.

This depiction—not only of the innumerable dead, but of the relative rarity of the young, and their inability to survive the increasingly inhospitable landscape—is underlined by a further example of a landscape that has been altered, or created, by bodies. “Childless Cho-choli” (41) was once a member of a flourishing village, until the water that supplied that village was re-routed in order to better serve the interests of the powerful who

lived elsewhere: “they built pipes into our well and our water disappeared,” Cho-choli explains, “So our village began drying up, even the wombs of our women” (42). Her two young children having died of thirst, Cho-choli retired to a cave, where her weeping filled the cave system with salt water. Discarded bones, salt water, and dead children combine, therefore, to depict a landscape that is not only impoverished, but also increasingly sterile and hostile to growth. This underlines, again, the fantastic morphology of landscape within the novel, where human bodies both alter landscapes and are reflective of them.

Whereas the dystopian desert landscape of *Locust Girl* is indicative of sterility, there is a limited landscape bordering that region that is capable of relative ecological health. The Kingdom Builders, who maintain the border and the landscape on either side of it (including their own comparatively healthy land, where food is produced and political decisions made) inhabit an environment where trees and animals survive. Animals, particularly, are not terribly common, and when they occasionally appear are typically hunted for their fur. This exploitation mimics that of the Kingdom Builders towards people like Amedea, who live on the sterile side of the border, and who must sometimes barter their own body parts for food.

Predatory relationships like these, however, can always be altered towards more regenerative connections. By crossing the border, Amedea demonstrates the potential permeability of that border, and brings the two communities closer together. This is not an entirely successful merger: the relationship between the two landscapes is too tightly controlled, and the Kingdom Builders have too great an interest in maintaining their own prosperity. Amedea, however, is herself a site of resistance, personifying in a unique form

the connection between body and landscape. The locust buried in her forehead, the locust that shares dreams and songs with her, is an opportunity for transformation. Amedea, who contains multitudes of stories in an environment where memories are controlled in order to support the continuation of a single story—one which valorises the Kingdom Builders and their continued destruction of landscape—*becomes* the locust. “My body grew, pushed to accommodate all voices from all sides of the border, both desert and green haven. I couldn’t contain them. I couldn’t bear the strain. My body burst and caught fire,” (173) she says. From the charred remains of her body, the Amedea-locust emerges—“a locust with the heart and mind of a girl” (175), who can share memories and dreams with people who live on both sides of the border.

This transformation, this act of resistance, can be interpreted through a lens of human and nonhuman reconciliation, one which overlays the dystopian elements of the novel with “more hopeful, magical-realist imaginaries of multispecies movement” (Sadowski-Smith, 2021: 112). The historical sterilisations of the desert regions necessarily limit the human societies that live there, and have also killed the nonhuman inhabitants of that region, leaving it largely devoid of plants and animals. These organisms have stories of their own, and their loss contributes materially to the impoverishment of landscape on both a cultural and ecological level. Amedea’s metamorphosis rebalances the relationship between human and nonhuman, and the locust becomes more than a consumable item in a degraded food web; it becomes a necessary part of a cultural ecosystem and a crucial influence on landscape, as it has in the past (and will be again in the future). Resistance in *Locust Girl*, then, is centred on the building of community links, not only within

a community, but between the human and the nonhuman.

The specification that this connection is built on the back of an insect is an interesting choice. Insects are, on the whole, perhaps not the most sympathetic of animals; readers may be forgiven for thinking that another mammal, for example, might be more successful in invoking identification and sympathy as well as reconciliation. Insects, however, are food. They are also pollinators, and therefore food-producers; they are necessary to build resilient ecosystems. They are also, like other nonhuman animals, blind to political borders. Their ability to quietly fly, crawl, or otherwise creep over lines on a map makes them well-suited to stories that involve migration. It is notable that, in both the texts explored here, the connection between migration, story, and organism is interrogated in multiple and often contradictory ways.

The characters of *Locust Girl* exist in a world where migration is strongly discouraged. Attempts either result in death, leaving endless bones stretching along a border length of barbed wire, or otherwise the few successful migrants are forced into subservient positions and prevented from returning to their families. It is no surprise that the stories, and the memories, of this world are ruthlessly suppressed in order to propagate a rigidly limited set of experiences. In other worlds where migration is a fact of life, however, as in *Sweet Fruit, Sour Land*, migrants bring their stories with them (Mathilde is from France, and Jaminder from Kenya; both have come to the United Kingdom as environmental refugees). As a result, their experiences allow them to more effectively identify and resist the exploitation that landscape and opportunity have forced upon them. Their understanding of history, and their ability to recognise oppression and to communicate that understanding to others—“We look out for each other, don’t

we?” (172)—are advantages in maintaining their own agency and resilience both within the impoverished landscape, and in weathering the political response to that landscape.

Whereas exploitation is centred around treating people as inseparable from landscape in *Locust Girl*, in *Sweet Fruit, Sour Land* exploitation centres around treating people as a substitute for landscape. The increasing sterility of the land—a sterility primarily defined within the text by its inability to produce sufficient food to sustain human population levels—is contrasted with the novel’s focus on women’s fertility, and the expected expression of that fertility through state-mandated reproduction. The glaring reality that adding to the population of an existing community only increases pressure on an already vulnerable landscape, and on its faltering ecosystem services, is almost ignored by the state. It is, crucially, *not* ignored by the women who are expected to bear these children. They see, quite clearly, that fertility cannot be reassigned from landscape to individual as if it were a transferable resource. “It’s cruel, isn’t it?” says Gwendolyn. “A very specific type of cruelty. To impose children on people who can’t feed them” (114). Mathilde’s grandmother is in strong agreement. “How many friends have you lost to this insanity?” she says. “To this crazy notion that even though there’s not enough for the living, we should make as much room as we can for the unborn?” (94). There is only one rational conclusion, she argues: “To bring a child into this nothing is cruel” (95).

If the choice to eschew personal sterility is a choice rooted in cruelty, then resistance, in *Sweet Fruit, Sour Land*, is connected to both sterility and to resilience in very distinct ways. Resistance is manifest in the deliberate choice to refuse to take part in human reproduction, and to embrace the possibility of sterility in self,

if not in landscape. Jaminder reasons that the world:

will go on without all of us. And maybe that's a shame for us, that our pocket of time on this earth was wasted and if viewed from faraway said something awful about human nature. But I don't think it's necessarily a shame for the earth itself. I think it could find a way to carry on without our disturbance. I think it would quietly thrive. (287)

Jaminder comes to appreciate the value of this anthropogenic absence, even though she has a child of her own to look after. Voluntary sterility, she accepts, is a valid choice. There is no unnatural bodily transformation within the novel; neither Mathilde nor Jaminder suddenly becomes nonhuman, nor do they take on nonhuman characteristics in the way that Amedea does. Instead, they come to value the nonhuman in a different way, realising that landscape is affected both by the presence of humans and by their absence. A similar argument is made by Alan Wiseman, who while arguing that “nature has been through worse losses before, and refilled empty niches,” does acknowledge that “since some things we've done are likely irrevocable, what would remain in our absence would not be the same planet had we never evolved in the first place” (2007: 5). Those women in the text who choose to resist the continued exploitation of its impoverished landscape, and who centre that resistance within their own bodies, are materially contributing to the increased future resilience of the landscape that they inhabit, and the nonhuman organisms that live there.

This particular solution is one that might easily tip over into eco-fascism, yet Ley's presentation of the dual dystopian exploitation of landscape and women underlines the right to

choose as a legitimate *choice*—one that is linked to landscape in collaborative and empathetic, instead of exploitative, ways.

Conclusion

Both Ley and Bobis explore, in very different ways, the idea of re-establishing functioning and resilient communities within an impoverished landscape. Ley's approach is more focused on individual futures, and Bobis' on community memories, but they both ultimately interpret impoverished landscapes as sites of resistance and renewal. Both environments are presented as dystopias, and it is also true that the budding resistance in each novel does not transform those dystopias into more liveable and sustainable landscapes. The potential is there, however, even if that potential is wrapped in the bodies of insects, or manifests in a world where those insects no longer exist. Engagement with the nonhuman elements of the impoverished landscape encourages the valuing of those elements as important, necessary factors in the continuation of the landscape. That valuation will sometimes include the acknowledgement that, in impoverished landscapes, it is not always the human inhabitants who must be the sole priority. Ecological resilience is connected to human resilience, and the impoverished landscape—which lacks the former—will undermine the latter. Centring resistance to exploitative political relationships within the impoverished landscape, however, allows for the development and prioritisation of resilience on more than one level, and for more than one population.

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