

Nature-Deficit Disorder in the Mexican Dystopia: Carlos Fuentes, Carmen Boullosa, and Homero Aridjis

El presente estudio tiene como fin analizar el vínculo entre el medioambiente y la psicología en las novelas más representativas del género distópico en la literatura mexicana: Cristóbal nonato de Carlos Fuentes, Cielos de la Tierra de Carmen Boullosa, La leyenda de los soles y ¿En quién piensas cuando haces el amor? de Homero Aridjis. Partiendo de un marco teórico basado en la ecopsicología, se analiza en estas novelas el motivo que, para los fines de nuestro estudio, denominamos el "nature-deficit disorder". Mientras estas novelas han sido analizadas por sus temas de la globalización y del poscolonialismo, el motivo de la psicosis acarreada por la destrucción de la naturaleza no ha recibido el mismo nivel de atención crítica a pesar de ser un fundamento primordial del género en cuestión.

Naked, they took to the forests.
There they learned from the trees, beasts, birds, colors, sun.
(Yevgeny Zamyatin, *We*)

Set in the future, dystopias extrapolate from our age of technology to imagine the nightmare of a hyper-modern society far-removed from our natural origins. They are designed to disturb, to alert readers to the perils of urban trends that prove hazardous to the health of the individual, and to the collective psyche of an entire system of culture. Central to these concerns, environmentalism has long underpinned the ethos of dystopian fiction, dating back to the nineteenth-century emergence of the genre. On the heels of the Industrial Revolution, dystopian fiction warned of the correlation between the rise of the machine and our consequential estrangement from nature. It responded to a dangerous mindset that had abandoned the archetype of a bucolic paradise to usher in a new hope based on technology and buoyed by the hegemony of empire. On this point, Miguel López-Lozano affirms:

With the dawn of industrial capitalism, nature came to be considered as an endless reserve of raw materials available for exploitation as science and technology were

developed to meet the needs of Europe's growing population. While in the early modern age the territories of the Americas had provided both material and imaginary resources for the emergence of capitalism, in the industrial age, images of technology displaced the pastoral utopia, thus negating the Golden Age dreams of a return to nature as a pristine state. (*Utopian Dreams* 3)

More than just a mindset had changed. At this point in history a fateful shift was underway, reversing the balance of power between humans and nature that had defined our existence since the origins of our species. We once worshiped nature, ascribed to it supernatural powers, and lived in awe of the supremacy that it undeniably held over us. This changed, however, when we discovered and unleashed the energies stored in fossil fuels. As environmental historian, Shawn Miller, explains, "cultures empowered by these new, prehistoric fuels have quickened history's pace. History is cultural time, and it was this point that our cultural clock began to outpace the Earth's biological clock" (138). What the pioneers of dystopia foresaw during the burgeoning industrial age was that the sudden acceleration of modernity threatened to distance us from our true selves. In a word, it threatened to render us "denatured."

Ecopsychologists probe further back in our cultural history, to the Fertile Crescent and the dawn of agriculture *circa* twelve thousand years ago, to study the incongruences between our genetic adaptations to ancestral environments and our rapid cultural transformations.¹ Still only a chromosome pair away from an arboreal night's sleep, *Homo sapiens* had lived for 188 thousand years migrating as hunter-gatherers, shaping our grey matter through the endless interaction with the complexities of a dynamic biosphere before it dawned on us to begin planting the seeds that we once consumed, and to domesticate the beasts we had pursued in the wild. A new, sedentary way of life was invented. Though genetic adaptation remains a variable in our evolving genome, in essence, our psychology, developed over the course of 200 thousand years for our species, and over two and a half million years for our genus, has not kept pace with the last twelve thousand years of cultural advance. How could it? The evolutionary clock of natural selection (epigenetics notwithstanding) works at a comparatively much slower pace.² When we add the last minute discoveries of fossil fuels, electricity, and quantum mechanics to this precipitous spread of our civilization, the nascent digital world with its mounting residual impurities appears a most unlikely surrogate for our original ecosystem. Therein lies the conflict. On a geological scale, this upheaval to our place in the world happened only yesterday and, now that

we have to live in it, a range of modern psychological disorders have been diagnosed as collateral damage.

For his part, Richard Louv has garnered acclaim with his study of “nature-deficit disorder” in a seminal work titled, *Last Child in the Woods*, where he argues along similar lines that modern urban life represses the ecological unconscious of our children’s generation with unprecedented consequences. We are born, he reminds us, with a brain evolved for the sensory world of natural ecosystems, whereas the twenty-first century finds us awash in data and electronic stimuli, a digital environment conducive to “cultural autism” (Louv 64). Nature feeds the imagination (the hallmark of our species), particularly during childhood development. But today’s synthetic world severs this vital connection, resulting in an era of conspicuous psychotropic drug prescription, redolent of Huxley’s *Brave New World*.³ Pharmacology, technology, science and religion have all proven inadequate proxies for our primordial need to connect with nature. Though they may potentially distract or dull the psyche, they have proven ineffective at satisfying this need completely. In sum, these are familiar echoes of the forewarnings that have continually resonated within the registry of the literary dystopia, a genre intended to articulate the fallout from our accelerated cultural advance when it fails to account for the measured pace of our inherited psychology, which remains rooted in the Earth that shaped us. It is clearly unsurprising that the destruction of nature or our quarantine from nature begets mental illness, and yet the trend remains on the rise, drawing an increasing amount of attention from psychologists, environmentalists, and dystopian thinkers alike.

There is thus a degree of organic environmentalism that underlies every dystopia, a green coefficient calibrated to convey a distressing image of the vulnerabilities of our Earth-born human nature, of our anemic withering in the pathological setting of urban sprawl. In the canonical works of the genre, for instance, such alienation from natural environments necessitates either palliative substitutes (Huxley’s “soma”), rigid control measures (Orwell’s “Big Brother”) or, as in Zamyatin’s *We*, quoted above in the epigraph, outright escape. There are differences in the Mexican dystopia, to be sure, but this green coefficient proves especially relevant south of the *maquiladora* belt where successive governments have sped headlong toward assimilation into the global economy heedless of the costs to the environment. Such are the presumed sacrifices exacted from a so-called developing nation.⁴ On the word of the Mexican novelists most representative of the dystopian genre (Carlos Fuentes, Carmen Boullosa and Homero Aridjis), it is evident that this zeal for economic development has not only encroached on the country’s pre-Columbian

heritage but, just as critically, it has undermined the vital balance that indigenous culture has traditionally sustained with Mexico's natural resources. In this sense, Mexico's compliance with the global financial system has equated with nothing less than a round peg for a pre-Columbian square hole. The discord between industrial capitalism, and the indigenous ideal of *buen vivir* (living well in balance with nature), is emblematic of a 500-year old conflict, too often belittled as the "Indian Problem."

Making world headlines, this disparity between incompatible worldviews flared up prominently at the dawn of NAFTA in 1994 with the ensuing Zapatista uprising. For the indigenous of Chiapas, NAFTA was eerily evocative of the *Porfiriato* of old.⁵ In fact, amendments to Article 27 two years earlier appeared to have been orchestrated in advance, specifically to allow unobstructed access to natural resources. The years leading up to and immediately following NAFTA were thus marked by escalating tension between nature conservationists and foreign corporate interests. As it happens, this is when our three Mexican novelists wrote their dystopias and, accordingly, the better part of the literary criticism surrounding these novels has been focused on the fallout from globalization as a prime mover of the genre, and rightly so. There is little doubt that the uncertainty provoked by NAFTA was instrumental in the dystopian imaginings that came out of the 1980s and 90s. However, the motif of psychosis linked to environmental degradation is not merely incidental, nor subordinate to a main clause of malevolent economics, as it is often portrayed in secondary sources. It is our contention that a more complete analysis is required here. Not only is the motif of nature-deficit disorder central to the universal canon of dystopian fiction but, in the Mexican dystopia, what it articulates is undeniably one of the country's more pressing questions: when will preferential treatment be shown to Mexico's natural heritage instead of the multi-national companies that pollute it? No matter how one phrases the question, it is clear that a new environmental angst emerged to usher Mexico into the twenty-first century and, fittingly, it found a voice in dystopian fiction. In spite of revolutionary rhetoric from politicians, and an emergent paradigm of decolonization to foster the slow recovery of *buen vivir*, Mexican society faces growing economic imbalances that continue to transform rural populations into migrants who abandon their roots to file into crowded city slums, ending a relationship with their native land which, in many cases, dates back for generations. The angst that provokes dystopic imaginings in Mexican fiction is thus predicated on more than just a fear of predatory industrialization by foreign companies. There is ample evidence

in the corpus of novels studied in this article that the fear of dystopia is just as closely related to a psychological crisis that degenerates in direct proportion with the subject's separation from nature. In this sense, though industrialization and urbanization remain key factors, it is the motif of nature-deficit disorder that appears the more immediate stimulus for conveying dystopia's signature countercultural and accusatory message.

CARLOS FUENTES – "MAKESICKO CITY"

In his study of the psychoterratic, Glenn Albrecht examines the issue of how the cultural homogenization occasioned by the global economy bears adverse psychological effects. In a world where our vital connection to the diversity of nature has been dumbed down in urban settings by corporate uniformity (the brave new McWorld), some are beginning to feel like "existential outsiders" (Albrecht 248) in their own native space. He writes of his own experience upon returning to his birthplace:

The new signifiers of place are the global symbols of modernity – tower block city buildings, rapid transit systems, global franchises, and McMansions in the suburbs. The heterogeneity of endemic colors and shapes of native flora and fauna was being replaced by the homogeneity of the universal livery and design of brand modernity. (248)

Along similar lines, Scott Donald Sampson distinguishes between the illnesses of nostalgia (associated with displacement from one's homeland) and "solastalgia" (36), which results from the *devastation* of one's homeland, an affliction that affects an increasing number of urban Westerners. In the novel, *Cristóbal nonato*, by Carlos Fuentes, both points (the homogenization and the devastation of one's native surroundings) are readily showcased in a saga narrated by an omniscient fetus who observes from in utero a world of fast food outlets and garbage that awaits him upon his birth. Inevitably a recurrent theme of nostalgia emerges, most overtly for "La suave patria" captured in verse by the nation's celebrated poet of yesteryear, Ramón López-Valarde. There is also an identifiable nostalgia for the pre-Columbian era when nature conservation was enshrined in indigenous systems of belief. But such nostalgia serves primarily to stand the urban chaos of a modern dystopia in relief, relegating the greener Mexico of former times to a utopian past. From the onset the novel posits an unrequited longing for human-nature bonds as a central storyline. In this atypical bildungsroman, Cristóbal's search for identity is driven by an instinct to connect with his native environment. According to Sampson's "topophilia hypothesis," such human-nature

bonds are innate, having played a vital role in hominin evolution dating back to the Pleistocene when natural selection favoured cognitive capacities relating to the acquisition and sharing of place-based knowledge and skills (Sampson 30). It is an academic account for what we recognize intuitively as our species' love of nature. Louv, in turn, emphasizes that it is the multisensory experience of nature that sustains intellectual development, and that the instinctive genius of childhood is connected to a "spirit of place" (Louv 86). In *Cristóbal nonato*, a spirit of place, or the love of natural space (topophilia), is precisely what the poem, "La suave patria," is meant to convey: "Patria: tu superficie es el maíz / y tu cielo, las garzas en deslíz / y el relámpago verde de los loros" (López-Velarde 267). As explained in what follows, however, such longing is represented with calculated satire to emphasize the protagonists' contempt of what has become of the once sweet fatherland of Mexico, laid to waste by the misguided principles of industrial capitalism.

By and large, the essence of dystopia amounts to our instinctive love of natural space (*topos-philia*) being compromised in one way or another by our culture's ill-treatment of said space (*dys-topos*), typically via combined forms of political, economic, and environmental abuse. Nowhere in *Cristóbal nonato* are these dystopian underpinnings more evident than in the resort slum of Acapulco, where the story begins. The choice of locale to set this tone is transparently strategic. Here, the tourist-based putrefaction of a once pristine fishing village serves as a fulcrum throughout the novel for depicting the impact of environmental degradation that stems from auctioning off Mexico's natural heritage to the highest foreign bidder. Published in 1987, the novel is set in a near future: the year 1992, not to commemorate, but rather, to ridicule the 500th anniversary of Columbus's arrival. With Columbus came the West's priorities of mercantilism, military superiority and, just as damaging, a fervor for monotheism that vilified local religious beliefs: the beginning of the end for nature worship. In the 500-year aftermath, Acapulco is singled out for the magnitude of its environmental failings, as implied by a series of play on words: dressing up "Acapulcro" (Fuentes, *Cristóbal* 247) for tourists; soiled by sewage in "Cacapulco" (240) or oil spills in "Blackapulco" (177); a beastly metamorphosis in "Kafkapulco" (297); the end of a tropical paradise in "Acapulcalipsis" (243). As such, the once iconic tourist retreat, equated in *Cristóbal nonato* with an old prostitute who is used and abused by foreign tourists, serves to establish a motif that likens Mexican topography to a diseased body: "Vio una angosta nación esquelética y decapitada, el pecho en los desiertos del norte, el corazón infartado en la salida del Golfo en Tampico, el vientre en la ciudad de México, el ano supurante y venéreo en

Acapulco" (27). In effect, the tragic pattern of polluted Mexican coastlines, where one resort hotel jumps ahead of the next to develop a new patch of unspoiled beaches, all began in Acapulco (Miller 222-225). Thus the town that had been earmarked for development in the 1950s to project a progressive and cosmopolitan image of the nation has come to symbolize instead the country's legacy of mismanaging its own tropical paradises. Writing in the sand where Cristóbal is conceived, his father can only conclude that Acapulco is "todo lo que no es la suave patria" (*Cristóbal* 247), as he parodies the above-cited poem: "Patria, tu superficie es el bache, digo / Tu cielo es esmog estancado" (247).

Evoking Albrecht's observations of a sense of estrangement in our own local space, Acapulco is aglow with multinational fast food outlets and government slogans, "MEXICANO INDUSTRIALÍZATE: VIVIRÁS MENOS PERO VIVIRÁS MEJOR" (*Cristóbal* 31): an unabashed overture to the masses, orchestrated by politicians who operate in collusion with foreign investors. Cristóbal, like his parents, will be born an "existential outsider" (Albrecht 248), disconnected from the native soil beneath their feet. It is an inauspicious beginning. From the moment of his conception he suffers fetal distress on account of the foregoing and because of the real threat posed by pollution to the health of his DNA. It augurs poorly, for example, when Cristóbal juxtaposes the micro-ocean of gestation where he floats in his mother's womb with the polluted ocean of Acapulco. Here he contemplates the fate of his genes in limbo, observing his parents "inmersos en el mar que es la cuna de la vida" (*Cristóbal* 119), but a cradle soiled by "los desechos de cien hoteles, mierda, meadas, botellas, cáscaras de naranja, corazón de papaya putrefacta, huesos de pollo, kótex y condones, tubos de aceites varios, los aceites mismos ... se batía entre el oleaje negro" (177). Instinctively Cristóbal identifies his primordial origins in the Earth's oceans, as attested by "el océano primitivo dentro de cada uno de nosotros" (119), but his origins have been compromised. In the micro-ocean that Cristóbal bears within, "suena un rumor de agua sucia, bombeada y pestilente, como paralelo gigantesco a los latidos y a los riesgos del propio corazón" (118). It is thus this initial concurrence between his fetal distress and the polluted world outside the womb that frames the protagonist's nature-deficit disorder, a central story line that worsens in direct proportion to his mother's journeys across the nation.

Not surprisingly, the representation of Mexico's indigenous peoples measures the extent of 500 years of environmental impact and, at the same time, it alludes to a would-be alternative to dystopia, a model of free-range, natural living. But here, the best Fuentes has to work with is satire, stopping short of any romantic temptation to portray a more noble

existence: “todos los pueblos indios entre Sonora y Yucatán solo tenían tres cosas en común: la pobreza, el desamparo y la injusticia” (*Cristóbal* 230). Nevertheless, the legacy of the pre-Columbian past looms at the periphery of modern society like an omen, conjuring an implicit reverence from the protagonists: “los indios son lo único que nos queda; son nuestros fantasmas” (255); “le debemos lealtad al mundo de los indios” (255); “matar a un indio es como incendiar una biblioteca” (255); “son los ... seres más valientes, más tercos, más locos del mundo” (341). Thus, the only space for the greener Mexico of the indigenous, and the countercultural vigor that they embody, is relegated to the ether of wistful memory. In a dream sequence, for instance, we return to ancient Tenochtitlán, afloat on Lake Texcoco, with skiffs laden with flowers navigating the canals, and pedestrians strolling placidly under the fresh shade of weeping willows, and “los ahuehuetes, árboles abuelos” (451). The cleanliness and natural beauty of Tenochtitlán were indeed legendary, bewildering to the eyes of the Spanish. Upon awakening, however, a brutal reality sets in: “los lagos muertos, eso ve, los canales convertidos en sepulturas industriales, los ríos tatemados, una coraza ardiente de cemento y chapopote devorando lo que iba a proteger: el corazón de México” (451). What had been revered as the Venice of the Americas was now transformed into “Makesicko City” (92), laying bear that a once thriving civilization has been degraded to the status of urban disease, a veritable pathogen.

As in Acapulco, *Cristóbal*'s anxiety in the nation's capital centers on the health of his gestation in a denatured environment. From the womb he witnesses a vast metropolis whose “cadena genética es una montaña circular de desperdicios eslabonados unos con otros como anunciándole a la Ciudad su Destino: el Desperdicio” (506). A dystopia rife with the author's renowned sardonic wit, the novel features a PRI government that responds to the nation's ecocide with either apathy or utopian rhetoric. It would be injudicious to rush into pollution controls when, as one politician observes, “ahora estamos creciendo, no podemos parar, estamos debutando como gran ciudad, ya regularemos en el futuro” (91), satirizing the teleology of progress, the triumphant march of development, the linear logic of the West. Instead of progressive action, then, the government resorts to false advertising, and subliminal messages, “UNIÓN Y OLVIDO” (325), interrupted by the recurrent news of government plans to construct a dome over the city that will purify the air, and distribute it fairly among all citizens, reminiscent of the enclosed metropolis of Zamyatin's *We*.⁶ Faced with such utopian simulacrum, and the pressing crisis of his health, as omniscient narrator and moral conscience of the nation, *Cristóbal* concludes that this urban dystopia is a violation of life itself, that the

destruction of nature is the destruction of oneself. In the tradition of Zamyatin's dystopia, the only solution is escape. Pushed to the breaking point, Cristóbal's flight instinct comes into full force: "nos rodea una orden de muerte o por lo menos de accidente, de defecto, tan implacables, tan temibles, que yo quisiera gritar desde el centro solar de mi gestación: A MÍ EL D.F. ME LA PELA" (491)!

For his parents, the urban metropolis is the antagonist that drives them to seek improved mental health in the nostalgia for a lost utopia. For Cristóbal, it is urban pollution that causes his distress over the real possibility of genetic mutation while in utero. In other words, his nature-deficit symptoms are precipitated by epigenetics, by his genetic susceptibility to environmental pressures that threaten immediate consequences: "... que el medio ambiente pueda forzar a los genes a cambiarme por otro individuo no previsto en mi código DNA" (492); "esta naturaleza de la ciudad mexicana, ciudad doliente, se ha extralimitado ... sacramento de la agonía, comunión de la peste: no nazco aún y amenazas ya con transformarme" (492); and "no soy el hijo de mis genes sino que seré el jijo del medio ambiente" (490)?⁷ This is the climax of an intrigue characterized by a conflict between grotesque economic development and the health of the fetal protagonist who, by his very name, embodies the failings of 500 years of botched colonialism. The correlation between nature-deficit and urban psychological disorder could not be more direct: "Matamos el agua. / Matamos el aire. / Matamos los bosques. / Muere, pinche ciudad!" (330)! But dystopia is meant to disturb, not to offer up solutions. Therefore, true to the genre's characteristic pessimism, after his nine months of gestation, the fetal narrator is resigned to a fatalistic view of his place in the world. Pursuant of his observations traveling across the country, instead of harmony with the Earth, his destiny is determined by the destructive tendencies of his forefathers. His destiny is to sever the vital bond between himself and nature:

Matamos a la tierra para poder vivir, y luego esperamos que la tierra nos perdone, nos absuelva de la muerte a pesar de que la matamos? ... no podemos ser uno de vuelta con la tierra explotada, menos castigos nos da ella, la muerte, que nosotros a ella, la violencia : ái te vengo, mundo, para actuarte mi dosis de violencia, violencia sobre la naturaleza, violencia sobre los hombres, violencia sobre mi mismo : a ese destino voy. (558-559)

As for the indigenous past, alluded to ironically throughout the novel, it is presented as a reminder of what was lost, not as a shining example of potential curative measures for the future. It bears repeating that the

teleological presumption of the West (the round peg), that economic development implies progress, was forced into the square hole inhabited by people who understand time as cyclical, not linear. Unlike Western mythologies, which tend to be one-directional (from Genesis to Apocalypse, for example), indigenous mythologies are cyclical, aligned with the natural cycles (moons, seasons, life cycles and, by extension, carbon, water and glaciation cycles) that shape our existence. That this ancestral wisdom should be abandoned in favour of the canards of an invading ideology is a major grievance that drives *Cristóbal nonato*. Nonetheless, Fuentes is unequivocal in his views about returning to the indigenous past to alleviate today's woes – “imposible Quetzalcóatl, indeseable Pepsicóatl” (*Tiempo mexicano* 39) – meaning, that no matter how perverse society has become under the reign of modernity's god, “Pepsicóatl,” it remains impossible to turn back the clock to reinstate pre-Columbian values. Though the notion of a return to nature by indigenous communities may hold a certain moral appeal, particularly in utopian/dystopian imaginings, Fuentes resists any false hope of imbuing us with uncritical idealizations of indigenous peoples and of their relationship to nature. Indeed, the best he has to offer to his distressed reader is the tabula rasa obliteration of Acapulco and Mexico D.F., wiped clean by a tsunami and garbage fires, respectively, leaving rural peasants to begin anew. As one literary critic interprets this denouement, “por fin se realiza la supuesta meta primordial de la Revolución Mexicana. Los pobres vencen a los vendepatrias, la oligarquía” (Egan 120). Such demonstrations prove a natural adjunct to the dystopian genre, and the novel, *Cielos de la Tierra*, by Carmen Boullosa, is no exception. Though her account of Mexico's eclipsing of indigenous values is more nuanced, befitting the ethereal quality of the novel, as explored in what follows, the penalties that she portrays for the future are even more disastrous.

CARMEN BOULLOSA – “WITHOUT NATURE, MAN IS NO LONGER HUMAN”

In their study of Third World literatures, Ericka Hoagland and Reema Sarwal emphasize that both science fiction and the postcolonial are geared toward challenging imperialism, that both are positioned within an ethical framework that draws on injustice as a focal point. They write that these “genres are inherently moralistic and ethics-driven; each genre may force upon its readers difficult questions regarding complicity, loyalty, responsibility, and obligation” (6). For the purpose of this discussion, we will examine, in the vein of Hoagland and Sarwal's argument, how Boullosa conflates the postcolonial with science fiction, all the while sustaining an

unambiguous moralism that calls into question Mexico's centuries-old history of injustice, not only against her indigenous peoples, but also against the nature that shelters them and all Mexicans. Divided into three timeframes (colonialism, globalization, and a sci-fi perspective on a postwar civilization called, *L'Atlàntide*), her novel coalesces around the central line of reasoning that, by destroying nature in the search for utopia, humankind destroys itself. In this regard, Zac Zimmer argues that the reader of *Cielos de la Tierra* should resist a rigid periodization of the three contexts:

Instead of separating out the three different failed utopias, it is imperative that the reader view them as cumulative, overlapping, and entwined. The violence of conquest and colonialism; the violence of uneven development and globalization; the violence of a nuclear war; the violence of the actual elimination of history: all of these respective violences intermingle, feed one another, and ultimately merge into the whirlwind that wipes language itself [and humanity] from the face of the planet. (224)

Similarly, our focus on the recurrent motif of nature-deficit disorder connects the three otherwise disparate timeframes. It is an approach calibrated to draw out a perspective that both condemns imperialism and calls into question colonial attitudes responsible for the corrosion of human-nature bonds.

In *Cielos de la Tierra*, Mexico's past, present, and future appear an ineluctable march of foreign invasion that ultimately renders the country inhospitable. Beginning with the colonial era, it seems unavoidable that an accusatory outlook should arise that seeks to vindicate indigenous culture. As in *Cristóbal nonato*, the indigenous are tangential to the chronicles of colonialism, sidelined as objects in lieu of agents of imperial ambition. However, pre-Columbian values stand in relief by contrast against the foreigner's failed utopia, a failure owing to the conquistador's audacity, flying in the face of the indio's reverence for nature. As such, the narrator establishes at the outset that the erasure of Mexico's ancient gods is concomitant with ecological disaster (Boullosa 61). For the indigenous, nature and the sacred are one in the same. For the invading Spanish, though, unwitting of the consequences of their actions, evil omens of bad weather are unsurprising in a presumed godless land. In effect, ecological disaster only reaffirms the religious bias of the Spanish who are versed in the biblical mythology of the Apocalypse (Boullosa 80).

A dichotomy between idyllic nature and neocolonial ecocide is also observable in the contemporary setting, conveyed here again by the

nostalgia for a once greener Mexico City. Memories are conjured of earlier years before the economic miracle, when avenues were lined with lush foliage and forests under clear blue skies, unlike the post-industrialized, toxic wasteland endured by the narrator. As he words it, the city that once enchanted with its natural beauty, “hemos logrado convertirla en un dantesco hacinamiento de horrores arquitectónicos y en una pesadilla de gases letales que nos están matando en un vértigo suicida” (Boullosa 29). Industrial pollution looms large as the bequest of neocolonialism which, beholden to obey market forces to the detriment of local inhabitants, imbues the narrator with a sense of derisive fatalism: “debemos seguir seduciendo al capital extranjero demostrando en sus lares nuestras riquezas para que no nos dejen caer solos en nuestra barbarie” (147).

By the time *L'Atlàntide* materializes as the last refuge for humanity floating in the skies, the cost of centuries of human greed proves to be a planet spent. Biophilia is a distant memory in a land devoid of biota. At this futuristic stage, the aftermath for humanity surpasses a mere mental disorder. With our connection to nature severed entirely, we lose our humanity itself. This much is observed by the protagonist, Lear:

Fue la Tierra quien al morir mató al hombre. Naturaleza al irse se llevó al hombre consigo. Devastada, dejó al hombre sin alma. El hombre no lo imaginó, pensó que las cosas eran suficiente vínculo con la realidad, o que con su mente, su conciencia y su espíritu bastaba para continuar siendo humano. Y nosotros creímos que si nos esmerábamos en recuperar fragmentos de Natura, tendríamos alguna posibilidad de sobrevivencia. Todos nos equivocamos. (170)

Importantly, this somber realization dawns on Lear when she weighs the actions of a fellow immortal in *L'Atlàntide* who is involved in gruesome acts of infanticide. The unearthly perfection of a futuristic utopia, where the mind is supposedly freed from the vulgarity of the body, is sullied by unspeakable physical brutality. Since both body and mind are forged by nature, Lear knows intuitively that neither can survive when nature is destroyed. This is the turning point, which, standard in any dystopian intrigue, arouses suspicion in the protagonist that ultimately culminates in her defiance.

There is a tributary of the nature-deficit motif that warrants further consideration here. In postcolonial discourse, a binary distinction between the indigenous and the colonizer (as nature worshiper and, respectfully, nature's aggressor) has become common currency, orienting the axis of moral interpretation.⁸ In like manner, the representation of the human body in the novel broadly corresponds to the same binary logic. Here too

the dystopian future and the colonial past are conflated, in this instance, by their shared contempt for the human body, as expressed in *L'Atlàntide* and the Catholic Church: on account of the utopian drive to seek perfection in the supremacy of the mind and, respectively, the Franciscan premise that the female body is the font of Man's sins. On this point, López-Lozano reminds us that the first explorers likened New World nature to the female body, "inviting the gaze of the colonizer which is soon translated into terms of military, political, and cultural domination" (*Utopian Dreams* 11). Easily contrasted with such skewed concepts stand the indigenous, whose commonsensical views of the body as a part of nature free them from the anxiety generated by Western social constructs. That indigenous and nature are one in their naked savagery is thus the paradigm that grates against Western attitudes toward progress, civilization and, in due course, their discontents. Specifically, in *L'Atlàntide*, disgust is provoked by recollections of breast feeding and menstruation (Boullosa 166), echoing the Franciscan's rejection and denunciation of his own mother and of women in general, who are considered "aliadas del mal" (212). Such errant puritanism is precisely what spurs the dystopian subject to rebel, longing for the fulfilment of bodily instinct, to be freed from the repression of imposed social norms. Just as Lear defies *L'Atlàntide's* tyranny over the body by engaging in an act of carnal pleasure, so too does Hernando, the Franciscan monk, discover a life renewed by rediscovering the natural beauty of the body. A simple bath, which under normal circumstances equates with an act of cleansing, is rendered problematic by the Franciscans' apprehension of their own nudity. To this day, the reputation for the foul smell of a missionary body unwashed lingers infamously across the Americas: "Los muchachos indios nos llamaban los apestosos, en náhuatl nos lo decían, apestosos" (Boullosa 344). But thoughts of bathing stir in Hernando a reminiscence of childhood innocence. Wholesome images come to light of bathing as an infant with his mother, juxtaposed with evocations of naked *indio* couples finding comfort in each other's body. But, "ahí estaban los frailes, llamando a su consuelo pecado" (346). Driven to tears, Hernando fails to reconcile what he experiences as real (the natural beauty of the body) with what he was ordained to believe (the body as evil). In this sense, his nature-deficit disorder is diagnosed, not from a lack of contact with nature, but rather, from a willful hostility toward what is natural: his own body. History in the making, these are the origins of a fateful disconnect from nature, traced back to an invasive ideology notorious for vilifying the body as indecent, and for equating the indigenous reverence of nature as sinful.

In the end, the two streams of contempt (for the body and for nature) come to a confluence in the future of L'Atlàntide. What began under colonialism – the treatment of Mexico's indigenous peoples as “una comedia de horrores” (Boullosa 97) – culminates in a full-fledged dystopia where Lear, who records the psychological exigencies of history, must confront her own delirium. For her confirmation into L'Atlàntide she had been exposed to images of nature on the “Receptor” that depicted a pre-war planet teeming with greenery and humanity's natural interaction with flora and fauna (108-109). But these are illusory visions. The only planet she knows to be real is barren, save for wind swept debris. In consequence, nothing can prepare her for the sensorial experience of actual contact with the few scraps of untainted nature that survive, when she perceives in real time a river's clean running water, and a tree rustling in the breeze. The sights and sounds of nature's rebirth prove overwhelming to that which remains of her senses – “Mi cabeza (¡sola!, ¡sola!) se había perdido, como todas las de los *atlántidos*, llevando la dolorosa ruta de la locura...” (308-309) – attesting to a denatured state that is absolute. Elsewhere in L'Atlàntide psychosis becomes widespread, leading to degenerate acts of infanticide and cannibalism, evidencing, in turn, a corresponding state of dehumanization. In their detachment from nature, from their bodies, and from language itself in the pursuit of utopia, the *atlántidos* “han devenido en cerdos, comedores de carne de bebecitos muertos” (277). It is a psychosis that leads to the extinction of our species, best described as nature-deficit disorder to the extreme. It bears reiterating here the opening quotation to this section: “sin la prodigiosa Naturaleza el hombre ya no es humano” (Boullosa 171).

It is evident from the foregoing that a running narrative materializes within the three timeframes manifested in what is portrayed as a widening disconnect where once there was a primordial bond between humankind and our natural habitat. First, nature is maligned by Western religion in the colonial era, then abused by economic forces during neocolonialism and, finally, erased by science and technology in the dystopian future. In this last regard, Lynn Margulis and Bruce Scofield remind us that every *Homo sapiens* had once lived as a natural historian, that every *Homo sapiens* developed in the course of their lifetime a critical knowledge about the environment as a simple matter of survival. In the Pleistocene, respect for nature was, in essence, instinctive. It was only when agriculture-based urbanization separated us from our sustaining environment that we began to systematically and unconsciously damage the natural resources required for our existence. Ironically, the more we distanced ourselves from nature, the more our misguided world views about nature became

dominant. In effect, today's nature-deficit disorder corresponds to a self-centered view of the world that is enshrined in primarily two systems of belief of our own creation: religion and science. On this point, Margulis and Scofield conclude plainly:

Ignorance and denial of environmental problems stem from our dominant world view, anthropocentrism, which disseminates "authoritative" knowledge via religion and science that fatally shapes our relationship with the rest of the Earth's biota. Both rationalize and perpetuate pathological activities that degrade aspects of the environment that are essential to human health and happiness. (224)

On the whole, the novel that spans three timeframes – each advocating its own utopian ambitions (monotheism, economic development, and hyper-technology, respectively) – reads as a single allegory of history's wayward colonialism. Again the sweet fatherland falls into decay for having espoused imported archetypes that are hostile to the local environment instead of respecting the immediate example set by indigenous peoples who, by honouring nature for millennia, have demonstrated that they understand "las palabras de los antiguos dioses" (Boullosa 365). Herein lies the ethical framework, forcing upon the reader the abovementioned questions of "complicity, loyalty, responsibility, and obligation" raised by Hoagland and Sarwal. The message that Boullosa conveys unambiguously in *Cielos de la Tierra* is that when such utopian ambitions are pursued to the detriment of nature, we do so to our own peril: a point made even more overtly by Boullosa's contemporary, Homero Aridjis.

HOMERO ARIDJIS – "THE SUN, THE MOON, AND WALMART"

Accustomed to bribes and death threats, Homero Aridjis (Mexico's leading environmental activist) was disheartened, but not surprised, to learn that Walmart had suborned its way into a building permit close to the sacred pyramids of the Sun and Moon at ancient Teotihuacán: "the place where men became gods – or consumers?" (Aridjis, "The Sun" 1). Forever the bane of cultural patrimony, economic forces intrude wherever there are foreseeable gains, irrespective of the bigger picture. At Teotihuacán the pyramids stand as monuments to nothing less than our place in the universe, to our connection to the planet, begging an obvious question of developers: is nothing sacred? Born of a Greek father, and named accordingly after the classical philosopher, as a child Homero Aridjis was versed in mythologies: the ancient Greek, and the Aztec. Moreover, raised in rural Michoacán, he acquired a vested interest in preserving the local forests and wildlife that shaped his childhood.⁹ Thus the wisdom of the

ancients, and nature conservation became the two primary sources of inspiration that would later inform his writing: a unique combination that allows him to advocate ecological enlightenment, a curative “biosophy,” as his signature aesthetic. To this end, he states in an interview that his task as a writer “es contar las historias de este planeta y expresar una cosmología ecológica que no separe a la naturaleza de la humanidad” (Russell 66).

His vision of a future dystopia is set in the symbolic year 2027 which, on the Aztec calendar, marks the next pilgrimage to Teotihuacán for the ritualistic relighting of fires to pay tribute to the Sun. But Mexico’s people have neglected their ancient gods and rituals, and have thereby sealed their fate. Though, according to Aztec mythology, the world ends naturally with each solar cycle, this time the rotation has been hastened to its end by the proverbial folly of humankind. There is no more water, and birds have ceased to fall dead from the sky because there are no more birds.¹⁰ The sky has been “desmitologizado” (Aridjis, *La leyenda* 36), that is, it had been made by the gods only to be unmade (polluted) by humans. This is the inauspicious setting of Aridjis’s two dystopian novels: *La leyenda de los soles*, and its sequel, *¿En quién piensas cuando haces el amor?* There are subplots of survival that run concurrently through each novel, but the intrigue is peripheral to the overarching backdrop of the ancient gods’ dominion over nature, which is arguably the real storyline. This, as López-Lozano affirms, is what distinguishes Homero Aridjis’s version of the Mexican dystopia, where he resurrects “el mito azteca del Quinto Sol como una metáfora para describir las condiciones de deterioro ambiental que afligen a la sociedad mexicana” (“Pensar la nación” 176). The destruction of nature recalls the prophecies of old and, accordingly, the gods are reincarnated to walk amid a city on the verge of collapse. Speaking in Náhuatl, they mock the naivety of mortals who have destroyed the very planet that birthed them.

Nature-deficit disorder takes root in the nation’s capital where life withers without water, and burns under intense heat waves. Notorious for its thermal inversions that trap stagnant air in the atmosphere, the only noticeable weather patterns in Mexico City are expressed in terms of pollution. Where once they talked about rains in May, the October moon, and the chills of December, “ahora hablan de las partículas suspendidas, de las inversiones térmicas y de las concentraciones de ozono” (*La leyenda* 42). The disruption to circadian rhythms and seasonal phases, coupled with the delirium of the masses, is conducive to feeling “fuera de lugar, fuera de sí mismo, fuera de época” (*En quién piensas* 27). Such are the symptoms that attest to how nature’s collapse has an immediate impact on

the human psyche. Citizens are rendered mutants, transformed into “puercos mentales” (*En quién piensas* 176) by the ubiquitous entertainment big screens that Aridjis, showing his Greek mythology roots, terms the “Circe de la Comunicación” (176).¹¹ A striking revelation of nature-deficit disorder comes from the protagonist herself, who attributes her ailing condition to living in a toxic metropolis, cut off from her natural origins: “Soy un animal urbano, desarraigado de la naturaleza, que respira aire contaminado y bebe agua poluta, y así moriré” (165). Resigned to her fate, what ultimately surprises the protagonist when the city and its people are finally destroyed is her insensitivity and indifference. Without the vibrancy of nature, the forsaken city leaves its defeatist citizenry to fester in a sense of fatalism, incapable of recuperating a lost love of life.

Albrecht, true to his own biosophy, appeals for a universal love of life (biophilia) to counter just such a future, augured by the death of nature.¹² Played out in all cultures, however, this love of life must continually confront its binary opposite of necrophilia, an affinity for death that also proves an enduring obsession in society: as evidenced from public hangings to today’s CSI dramas, zombie culture, and video game carnage. As Albrecht argues, the predominance of today’s death culture has a circuit effect on our declining relationship with the environment insofar as, not only does the destruction of nature lead to a fatalistic necrophilia, it also desensitizes us to death in general: the death of one another, and of all living things. Albrecht writes that “necrophilia becomes a pathological state for individuals and society and locks all into a destructive mode of existence. In a time of the emerging influence of necrophilia, it is no wonder that there is little concern for the extinction of biodiversity and the obliteration of whole ecosystems” (253). The prevalence of death culture is thus emblematic of a nature-deficit disorder broadly defined, where the depreciation of life in society comes as a result of our estrangement from the life force of nature. Examples of society’s necrophiliac impulse are readily available throughout Aridjis’s published works, most notably in his book of short stories, *La Santa Muerte*, and indeed, in his two dystopian novels. The critical difference is that in his dystopian fiction there is a direct correlation between environmental disaster and a culture desensitized to death and suffering, between nature-deficit and necrophilia. This correlation is immediately observable in the showcase of cruelty to street children against the backdrop of the eco-Apocalypse that permeates both novels. The organ trade, and the child sex trade take on amplified proportions in the future, accepted as a degenerate status quo by the indifferent populace. The billboards read, “Odio a Primera Vista” (*La leyenda* 20), and people watch “Violadas Anónimas” (21) accompanied by

the continuous drone of radio updates broadcasting news of environmental doom. In the red-light district, the night is so stifling hot that a suspension of garbage, stench and reverberating metallic particles fills the air, casting a crimson glow over “la carnicería humana más grande del país” (*La leyenda* 77), where girls are auctioned off as slaves at the venereal market. The devaluation of the peso notwithstanding, what Aridjis underscores as a baseline allegory is that when nature collapses, a corresponding “devaluación humana” (*En quién piensas* 228) – read, necrophilia – ensues.

The irony that the metropolis besieged by drought and pollution once glistened afloat on Lake Texcoco is not lost. We are reminded that this place “no siempre había sido esa inmensidad irrespirable que hacía llorar los ojos y raspaba la garganta, sino un valle luminoso cubierto de lagos resplandecientes y verdes inmarcesibles” (*La leyenda* 15). As with Fuentes and Boulosa, Aridjis is evoking a utopian past to accentuate a dystopian future. But where Fuentes’s homage to the indigenous is construed as facetious, and Boulosa’s as otherworldly, the Aztec gods in Aridjis’s novels take center stage. The intrigue of the novels, the pervasive references to the dystopian setting, and the cataclysmic denouement all relate to Aztec mythology, conveying the message that Mexico’s past is inextricable from her future, and that today’s crisis is a reminder that Mexico needs to honour indigenous traditions, beginning with the primacy of nature over culture. The causal link between Mexico and her woes is, by now, a familiar one: the perverse coupling of opportunistic foreign investors with corrupt local officials who, in tandem, give rise to a false hope in imported interpretations of modernity and progress. In the Mexico of 2027, where they have replaced “a los sacerdotes por los contadores, a los chamanes por los economistas, a los magos por los licenciados” (*En quién piensas* 218), Aridjis parodies global economics as the new gods, and trade and industry as a sacred mantra.

In keeping with the ironic tone of the narrative, Mexico City officials concoct a remedy for a populace withering in an ecosystem that has been laid to waste: namely, simulacrum, reminiscent of *Cristóbal nonato*. The Circe broadcasts “Los tiempos más alegres de la Historia” (*En quién piensas* 188), while nature is replicated with plastic trees, and rubber dolphins swimming in artificial lakes (163). Historic buildings are torn down so that cardboard cityscapes of more prosperous nations can be erected in their stead (199). In so doing, the city maintains an image of progress and of successful integration into the global economy. Such fabrications, however, fail to conceal the crisis. Consistent through both novels, the author portrays a collective psychosis that results from an unnatural life,

characterized by existential apathy. Mexicans have become outsiders in their own land, indifferent to the imitation world around them, and numbed to their own misery. Only the protagonist, as Jeremy Larochelle points out, is conscious of the fact that he “experiences the drastic changes in the urban ecology, not only as a loss of vital natural resources and ecological destruction in and around the city he grew to know so well, but as the loss of an integral part of his own being, ‘la pérdida de su propio yo’” (648). López-Lozano, in turn, emphasizes the oblivion of Aridjis’s imagined masses who “are so estranged from the natural world that they barely notice its disappearance” (*Utopian Dreams* 189). The implications of nature-deficit disorder are unmistakable. Here again, as in the preceding dystopias by Fuentes and Boullosa, instead of a natural fate nurtured by Mother Earth, Mexico’s destiny is deviated by external economic forces, leaving behind a dazed populace reeling from the psychological fallout.

FROM PLEISTOCENE TO ANTHROPOCENE

It is sobering to weigh our almost three million year history of humble foraging in nature with hand ax, fire, and spear (the Pleistocene) against the last five decades of foraging throughout our solar system with rocket, orbiting telescope, and space station. Just as sobering, however, is the realization of what we might have accomplished with the sudden rise of our advanced technology had we fully understood our humble origins. But tribal prejudice, survival instinct, and self-interest have also proven fundamental to our genetic make-up which, when multiplied by our industrial prowess, yields the world we know today: the Anthropocene, a term that designates our current geological era, when the planet’s topography and ecosystems are significantly altered by human activity, the driving force behind the sixth extinction.¹³ Under the auspices of more mainstream disciplines like environmental and evolutionary sciences, the field of ecopsychology has developed as a matter of course. In like manner, ecocriticism is informed by a range of natural sciences precisely for a broader understanding of the role of literature in disseminating the bigger picture of a planetary consciousness. Importantly, both disciplines (ecopsychology and ecocriticism) comprise an activist dimension, proving themselves to be as countercultural as they are empirical, as moralistic as they are informative. Driven by social engagement as much as by science, then, both endeavour to provide insights into the precarious balance between ecological, psychological and cultural wellbeing: the tryptic of *buen vivir* that is threatened in the Anthropocene by, primarily, guiding principles based on our economy instead of our ecology. On this point, Andy Fisher asserts that: “the dominant interpretation of human nature

today is probably that of *Homo economicus*. In this view, humans are individuals with limitless wants, nature is 'scarce resources' to be exploited, rationality is the maximization of self-interest, and our moral responsibility is to consume" (83). To set forth such a ruinous self-understanding is transparently strategic here. The aim is to stir in us an environmental sixth sense in much the same way as dystopias are designed to awaken in the reader a disturbed awareness of our wayward trends. Spurred by the uncertainties that neoliberalism holds for Mexico's future, and galled by the indiscriminate destruction of the natural environment, Fuentes, Boulosa and Aridjis turned to the dystopian genre to voice their protest against Mexico's injudicious deference to market-oriented prerogatives. Proponents of global capitalism, neoliberalism, and free trade have swayed Mexican opinion to embrace a hypothetical upgrade to the nation's modern identity by aligning itself more closely to the economies and cultures of the Global North. In consequence, Mexico, so far from the gods and so close to the United States, has undergone significant policy changes that have fundamentally transformed Mexican identity and perceptions of its relationship with hegemonic world powers. As Stephen Morris argues, for example, the once default anti-American sentiment that had shielded cultural sovereignty in Mexico against incursion from the North has given way to a "perception of the U.S. as a model of progress and modernity, as efficient and pragmatic, as individualistic and materialistic, and as a potential partner in development" (215). Whether in political discourse, consumer patterns or public opinion in general, today's embrace of unobstructed globalization has been generally equated as a step forward toward an improved Mexico, the environmental costs notwithstanding.

Fuentes mocked this fallacy unambiguously: "es preferible tener inversiones y empleo, aunque sea con cáncer y enfisema" (*Cristóbal* 98)! Indeed, his treatment of the crisis, that for the purpose of this article we word as "nature-deficit disorder," is characteristically satirical. For Boulosa, in *Cielos de la Tierra*, nature-deficit disorder is more closely associated with the moral imperatives that skew history. Hence the sixth extinction appears fated. Whereas for Aridjis, who resurrects Aztec mythology to account for a latter-day calamity, his representation of the crisis fluctuates between a pseudo magical realism and outright hyperbole. In sum, the three outlooks combined render a collective Mexican dystopia articulated as a struggle against Western logic itself, against the teleological model of progress and development in a space still tied to an ancestral worldview that defies linear reason. Through their dystopian novels, Fuentes, Boulosa and Aridjis convey the counter argument that it

is nature that determines the robustness of culture, not trade and industry. In effect, their dystopias present a clear denunciation of economic pretensions as the root of their nation's cultural decay. As novelists, they differ significantly, and yet, they converge on the same atavistic impulse to evoke the ecological acumen of the indigenous to voice a shared contempt of local governments, and of their corruption and complicity with imported fiscal policies. In these novels, Mexicans are estranged from their own sweet fatherland (existential outsiders), portrayed to be as much the stepchildren in the twenty-first century as they were under the *Porfiriato*.¹⁴ Such questions of sovereignty call to mind Martí's oft-quoted essay, "Our America" (1891): "The struggle is not between civilization and barbarism, but between false erudition and nature" (183). Current postcolonial sensitivities often illustrate that when false erudition serves as the guiding principle, when it is favoured over local knowledge, nature is first to suffer the consequences: razed as an obstacle, or extracted as a commodity. By extension, false erudition threatens to turn us against our own *human* nature, against our psychological leanings that, dating back to the beginnings of the Pleistocene, were wrought from the very earth beneath our feet.

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NOTES

- 1 The science of evolutionary psychology (from which the better part of ecopsychology is derived) probes even further into our past, surveying the various species and sub-species of primarily our genus *Homo* and the genus *Australopithecus* to account for the psychological adaptations to recurring problems in our ancestral environment. Such psychological adaptations are largely based on evolved cognitive mechanisms originating from natural selection. For a more comprehensive study of the relationship between human evolution and the environment, see Renée Hetherington's *Living in a Dangerous Climate: Climate Change and Human Evolution*.
- 2 Unlike genetic evolution based on DNA sequence, epigenetics involves gene activation (or de-activation) brought about by environmental factors. Such alterations have been found to be heritable, enabling a significantly accelerated pace of evolutionary adaptation.
- 3 Louv cites, for example, the use of Ritalin rising 600% between 1990 and 1995, prescribed primarily for cases of ADHD (Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) (Louv 101).

- 4 Oswaldo de Rivero argues convincingly that countries like Mexico are condemned to “developing” status without any conceivable future of equaling the fully developed countries that control their fate. That economic development, as a Western ideal, is worth pursuing in the first place is the myth that de Rivero endeavours to debunk in his book, *The Myth of Development*.
- 5 Characterized by its partisanship of Eurocentric prejudices and foreign investment, the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz (the *Porfiriato*) was overthrown during the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). One of the more notable outcomes enshrined in the new constitution (1917) was land reform, specifically the peasant-based subsistence farming rights that would be protected under Article 27.
- 6 Zamyatin’s imagined dystopia is contained within a glass dome where mathematical perfection can be imposed on the populace. From the inside, the glass appears an unfamiliar hue of colors owing to the greenery of nature that is restricted to the outside.
- 7 It is worth mentioning that genetic mutation from exposure to Mexico City’s polluted environment is also the central story line in another dystopian novel: *The Rag Doll Plagues*, by Chicano novelist, Alejandro Morales. Part three of the novel features a futuristic world where the three countries of NAFTA have merged and established dividing lines between lower and higher life existence enclaves. In a twist of epigenetic fate, those Mexico City Mexicans living in lower life environments evolve a resistance to pollution and, thus, survive future plagues.
- 8 Shawn Miller argues that the myth of the noble savage, as non-acquisitive Indian who lives in complete harmony with nature, still holds a tempting moral appeal in postcolonial discourse. Though he outlines many detrimental practices in pre-Columbian civilizations that severely impacted their environment, he concludes that a critical difference still remained between the colonized and the colonizer with respect to their reverence, or lack thereof, of nature. In brief, he explains that the indigenous viewed their culture as a part of nature, whereas the colonizers made a deliberate point of separating themselves from it: “For Indians, the boundary between culture and nature, human and earth, was blurred. For Iberians, the division was stark, and they made it a point of honor not to cross it” (Miller 68).
- 9 Michoacán, the state where Homero Aridjis was raised, is home to the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve, a protected forest where the monarch overwinters each year. It was owing to his activism that the importance of the forest gained official recognition (now a UNESCO World Heritage Site), one of Aridjis’s greatest achievements in wildlife conservation.

- 10 In 1985, the year that Aridjis founded the Group of 100 (an environmentalist group consisting of 100 artists and intellectuals), birds were falling dead from the sky over Mexico City due to the severity of air pollution (Russell 66-67).
- 11 In Greek mythology, Circe is the enchantress who transforms people into animals.
- 12 It bears mentioning that, a pioneer of ecopsychology, it was Edward O. Wilson who coined the term, "biophilia," in his groundbreaking book, *Biophilia: The Human Bond with other Species* (1984). Equally influential was the work of Carolyn Merchant, whose seminal book, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (1980), consolidated the ecofeminist revolution.
- 13 The fossil record testifies to five major extinction events (the "Big Five") in the last 500 million years, the most recent being that of the dinosaurs of 65 Ma. Scientists are monitoring the next mass extinction presently under way in our own era, the Anthropocene, characterized by the rapid decline of biodiversity worldwide. For more on the human cause of the current extinction event, see Elizabeth Kolbert's *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*.
- 14 The expression that emerged from the Porfirio Díaz dictatorship, when landed estates were owned by foreign investors, was worded: "Mexico: mother of foreigners, and stepmother of Mexicans."

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