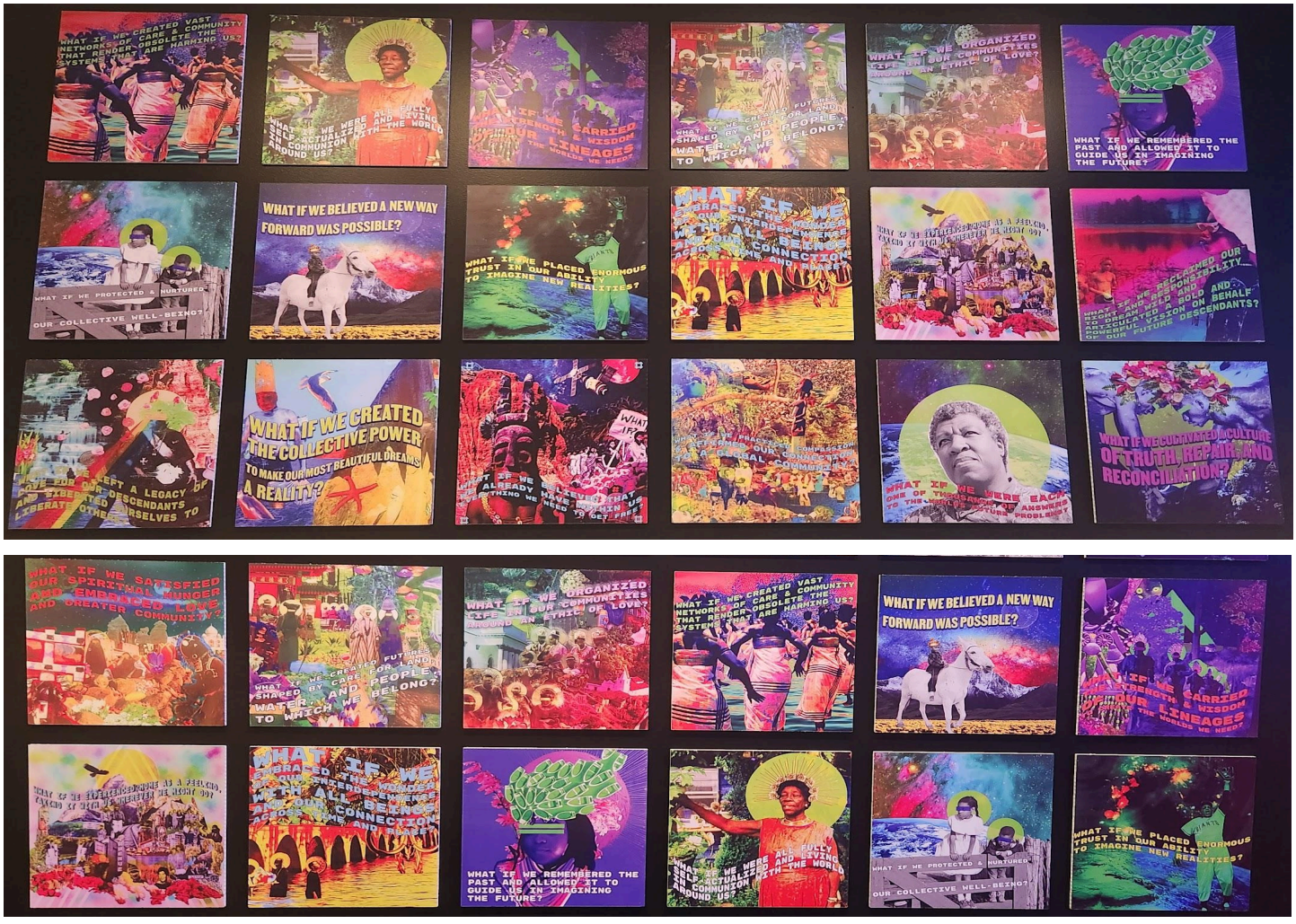
"What If," a paper for Prairie Group, November 2024
Rev. Karen Armina
Paper #1: In what ways does speculative fiction offer guidance or wisdom to the experience and embodiment of creating beloved community?
Word count: 5336

A note on structure: While we appreciate the program committee encouraging presenters/ respondents to consider using a variety of formats and practices in addition to or in lieu of a more traditional paper, Krista and I agreed that it would be fitting to offer our opening papers in our traditional format - with a few exceptions. My paper is more reflective in style, shares more words from others than we're used to, and includes art as a primary source.

Introduction



"What If? Cultivating Collective Imagination for a Beautiful Future" by Aisha Shillingford and Terry Marshall, 2021-2023

I got to experience this art at the Anchorage Museum in January 2024, as part of an exhibit called “How to Survive,” which highlighted how investing in community and caring for one another can be forms of climate mitigation. The name of the exhibit was inspired by a quote from Grace Lee Boggs, the Chinese-American civil rights and labor rights activist: “The only way to survive is by taking care of one another.” The description posted with this piece read, in part:

> This meme series grew out of a Black imagination study group the artists launched in 2020, in which they and a small group of co-conspirators began creating questions inspired by bell hooks, Frantz Fanon, Norma Wong, Adrienne Maree Brown, Bayo Akomolafe, and Robin Wall Kimmerer. The questions are intended as world-building prompts, asking the reader to envision wildly utopic possibilities for humanity and its relationship to Mother Earth. The artists see this invitation to dream as a form of care but also a necessary political tool for liberation, consciousness-raising, and social transformation. Shillingford says, “It’s our collective responsibility to leave a world that people can survive and thrive within. We need to expand our ideas of care beyond the personal and beyond just humans. I care about future generations and people on the other side of the world who must deal with our collective trash, or the creature downstream on this river who must navigate what I put in it. Our interventions are an invitation to broaden ideas about who is within our circle of concern. We are resisting the culture of individualism embedded within capitalism.”

Each meme offers a question that correlates with its image:

> *What if we created vast networks of care and community that render obsolete the systems that are harming us?*
> *What if we were all fully self-actualized and living in communion with the world around us?*
> *What if we created futures shaped by care for land, water, and people to which we belonged?*
> *What if we organized life in our communities around an ethic of love?*
> *What if we remembered the past and allowed it to guide us in imagining the future?*
> *What if we protected & nurtured our collective well-being?*
> *What if we believed a new way forward was possible?*
> *What if we placed enormous trust in our ability to imagine new realities?*
> *What if we embraced the wonder of our interdependence with all beings and our connection across time and place?*
> *What if we experienced home as a feeling, taking it with us wherever we might go?*
> *What if we reclaimed our right and responsibility to dream wild and articulated a bold and powerful vision on behalf of our future descendants?*

What if we left a legacy of love for our descendants and liberated ourselves to liberate others?
What if we cultivated the collective power to make our most beautiful dreams a reality?
What if we believe we already have within us everything we need to get free?
What if practiced compassion and affirmed our connection to a global community?
What if we were each one of the thousands of answers to the world's future problems?
What if we cultivated a culture of truth, repair, and reconciliation?
What if we satisfied our spiritual hunger and embraced love and greater community?
What if we carried the strength & wisdom of our lineages to create the worlds we need?

I offer this art to you as a way in to our topic. The way it was created embodies one of the main propositions of speculative fiction: that it takes multiple voices to imagine and build a future in which all can thrive. The questions posed in the memes are building blocks that speculative fiction uses to imagine possible futures. And one possible future is that in which the beloved community is being, or has been, built.

Foundations: Apocalypse

Eco-queer speculative fiction offers a foundational premise: the apocalypse has already happened. So many of the stories we've read are set in a time in which some end has come, and the survivors must find their way in its aftermath. The short stories, in particular, all begin and end in the middle of a longer narrative, offering us a glimpse into many possible worlds in which people in marginalized communities have had to respond or adapt to some version of end times. We don't know what happened to produce the present that's depicted in these stories and we don't know what the end result of the work the characters are engaging will be, but we do know that they're living in a place and time that has suffered an end.

This statement is not just about a genre of fiction; it is the reality of many people in present times. In her discussion of Rivers Solomon's book *An Unkindness of Ghosts*, Katie Hogan reminds us that, "black people lived in a dystopian world long before research scientists discovered the Anthropocene. White supremacy, in addition to religious patriarchy, economic injustice, and gender binaries, have made life on earth a disaster for black people and other

marginalized cultures and communities for many centuries."[1] And in his introduction to *Love After the End: An Anthology of Two-Spirit & Indigiqueer Speculative Fiction*, Joshua Whitehead writes, "we have already survived the apocalypse - this, right here, right now, is a dystopian present."[2] Theologian and author, and member of the Choctaw Nation, Steven Charleston, in his book *We Survived the End of the World: Lessons from Native America on Apocalypse and Hope*, agrees : "It was the experience of apocalypse, not just the fear of it, that my ancestors faced. On Turtle Island, the name many Indigenous nations give to North America, the apocalypse began its inexorable consuming of our Indigenous way of life from the moment European settlers reached our shores… If you wanted to find an experiential example of an apocalypse, you would be hard pressed to find one more total than what North America's Indigenous civilization confronted for more than four hundred years. If apocalypse means cataclysmic destruction - in essence, an end of the world - my ancestors went through it."[3] This understanding is not new to Unitarian Universalists. Rebecca Parker reflects on a liberal religious response to our post-apocalypse reality in her 2006 essay "After the Apocalypse." "If we can imagine that the Apocalypse is not ahead of us but already behind us, consider how we might regard our religious task differently…"[4]

When we understand that the apocalypse has already happened, we can also begin to grasp a second, related, foundational premise: we are, right now, living in an apocalyptic time. Apocalypse is not a single world-ending event, but rather, part of a cycle of history, and the cycle has come around for a much wider range of people than those impacted by North American colonization. And as we discussed during the 2022 Prairie Group gathering on "Theologies of Climate Resistance," we're living in multiple apocalypses that will force us to reckon with the destruction we've caused our earth home as well as to each other through the intersecting oppressions of white supremacy and extractive capitalism. Steven Charleston

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[1] Katie Hogan, June 11, 2020 "Past and Future Worlds: Queer and Non-Binary Dystopian Narratives" https://niche-canada.org/2020/06/11/past-and-future-worlds-queer-and-non-binary-dystopian-narratives/
[2] Joshua Whitehead, ed. *Love After the End: An Anthology of Two-Spirit & Indigiqueer Speculative Fiction*. Arsenal Pulp Press Vancouver 2023, 10-11.
[3] Steven Charleston. *We Survived the End of the World: Lessons from Native America on Apocalypse and Hope*. Broadleaf Books, Minneapolis 2023, 6-7.
[4] Rebecca Parker. "After the Apocalypse" in *Blessing the World: What Can Save Us Now*. Skinner House Books, Boston, 2006, 17

writes, “Apocalypse is what we are living through. It is the coming true of our worst fears, which in turn generates more visions, either of salvation or destruction. In human history we can trace how this process has unfolded over and over… We are in that part of the apocalyptic process where wars and rumors of wars abound, where we watch the specter of environmental collapse coming at us with what seems like unstoppable certainty; where institutions on which we have always relied are starting to wobble and crumble; and where disease can reach pandemic proportions that we struggle to control or contain.”[5]

Because apocalypse has already happened, we can learn from it ways in which we can face the apocalypse of the present. Stephen Charleston writes, “My ancestors are a case study in survival. Not the grim survival of bunkers and bomb shelters, but the liberating and hopeful survival of a spiritual community.”[6] And Rebecca Parker shares her vision for liberal religion’s response to this reality: “In the aftermath of the Apocalypse, the religious enterprise can be imagined as a kind of salvage work, recognizing the resources that sustain and restore life - resources that are ready at hand, not in some distant promised land.”[7]

So the stories we’ve read are set in fictional futures or worlds in which another apocalypse has happened - the apocalypse that is the expected result of today’s political, social, and climate crises. They’re written by people who are part of communities that have already experienced apocalypse - queer people, Indigenous people, people of color, disabled people. They imagine conditions in dystopian futures that have come around from their people’s dystopian histories. And they imagine characters that embody the fullness of the human experience in those conditions - love and hope and compassion right alongside fear and pain and grief.

Foundations: Beloved Community

Eco-queer speculative fiction offers a second foundational premise: there is hope, and that hope lies in us. This premise is the basis for the assertion that speculative fiction has something

[5] Charleston, 5-6.
[6] Charleston, 3.
[7] Parker, 21-22

to say about building and sustaining beloved community. I don't believe we can explore building and sustaining beloved community without spending a little time on exploring what we mean by the term first.

The King Center's Glossary of Nonviolence defines the Beloved Community as a "Term coined by philosopher Josiah Royce to denote an ideal community, used frequently by Dr. King to describe a society of justice, peace and harmony which can be achieved through nonviolence. …Dr. King said, 'The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community.'"[8] Their vision for beloved community is one in which the "triple evils" of poverty, racism, and violence are removed from society using nonviolence, which is "a love-centered way of thinking, speaking, acting, and engaging that leads to personal, cultural and societal transformation."[9]

There are different interpretations and visions of the term, and Adam Russell Taylor, the president of Sojourners and author of *A More Perfect Union: A New Vision for Building the Beloved Community* offers a modern one. In an interview for Sojourners Magazine,[10] Taylor said, "when I revisited a lot of Dr. King's speeches and civil rights history, [I noticed that he] would often mention Beloved Community, but there wasn't like a singular speech where he completely unpacked what the Beloved Community means. And so in one sense, it was almost like it was assumed that a lot of people understood what the concept meant, or maybe he was hoping that people would kind of fill in [the gaps] with their own values and priorities. And so I feel there is a need to recast the vision for the Beloved Community in more contemporary terms… For me, the Beloved Community is creating a community, a society, a nation, where everyone is seen, everyone is respected, where everyone is enabled to thrive, and everyone is able to realize their God-given potential… The Beloved Community is not complete until each of us is able to contribute our own definition."

[8] https://thekingcenter.org/about-tkc/glossary-of-nonviolence/
[9] https://thekingcenter.org/about-tkc/the-king-philosophy/
[10] Jenna Barnett. September 15, 2021. "'Beloved Community" Sounds Nice, but What Does It Mean?" Sojourners Magazine https://sojo.net/articles/beloved-community-sounds-nice-what-does-it-mean

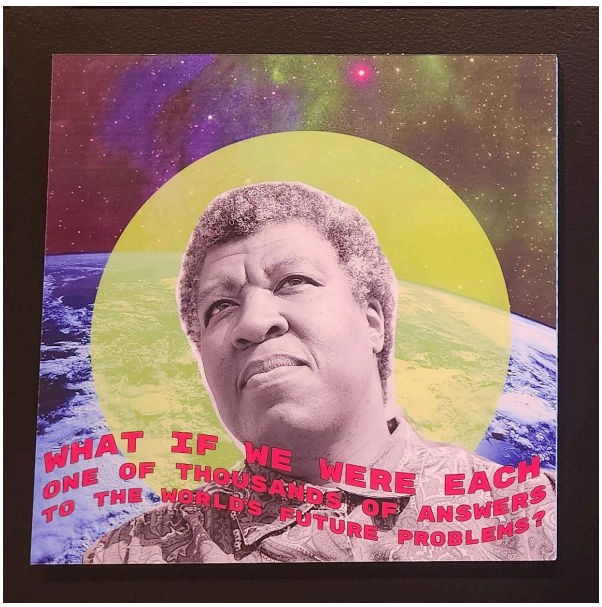
When thinking about beloved community in the Unitarian Universalist context, I draw from the theological work done by my friend and our colleague, the Rev. Nathan Hollister, founder of Sacred Fire UU, a ministry that plants and supports covenanted communities and helps our congregations to be more effective in their racial and social justice impacts. Nato, as many of us know him, bases his understanding of beloved community on James Luther Adams' foundational work, "Five Smooth Stones of Liberalism."[11] I talked with Nato as I prepared to write this paper, and his thoughts go roughly as follows.[12] If "revelation is continuous" (the first stone), then it's a theological imperative that we seek out the truths that are the least told and the least heard - the voices of the marginalized. If "all relations between persons ought ideally to rest on mutual, free consent and not on coercion" (the second stone), then we must ensure that the promises we make to one another are both understood and kept - our relationships must be covenantal. If "religious liberalism affirms the moral obligation to direct one's effort toward the establishment of a just and loving community" (the third stone), then those covenantal relationships must be grounded in love. If "we deny the immaculate conception of virtue and affirm the necessity of social incarnation" (the fourth stone), then those covenantal relationships grounded in love must build power and use it to shape institutions that work for justice. And if "the resources (divine and human) that are available for the achievement of meaningful change justify an attitude of ultimate [though not necessarily immediate] optimism" (the fifth stone), then we are called to keep trying, to keep working toward our ideals. Nato's work is also grounded in liberation theology, so that we can't call it beloved community if the poor and oppressed aren't free, and process theology, so that the work is a continuous unfolding, becoming, modeling/experimenting with alternatives, collective dreaming and co-creation of meaning and institutions. And he believes we need to be imagining the world we want and then work backwards from that vision, asking what would have to happen to get to this piece, and then go back from there, over and over, to give us concrete steps to take. So a theological foundation for the work of building beloved community for Unitarian Universalists is

[11] James Luther Adams. "Guiding Principles for a Free Faith" in *On Being Human Religiously: Selected Essays in Religion and Society*, Max L. Stackhouse, ed. Beacon Press, Boston, 1976, 12-20.

[12] The rest of this paragraph is based loosely on a conversation I had with Nato on September 20, 2024. If your interest is piqued by this, I encourage you to explore the description for the UUMA lifelong learning course he leads called "A Course for Social Transformation" at https://uuma.org/latest-news/a-course-for-social-transformation/

that we're a covenantal people, called to make covenant an actionable thing. If we believe in covenantal relationship before all others, then we must assess the relationships we're in, and identify which are free, voluntary, non-coercive, mutual. Our work is to remove ourselves from non-covenantal relationships and grow and strengthen the covenantal relationships we have, toward the goal of a society in which all people are free, based on vision and intention. Nato's understanding of beloved community departs from Dr. King's vision in the methods that can be used to create it; while Dr. King was committed to non-violence, Nato believes that using force to end a violent relationship can be reasonable.

Building on the Foundations: Thousands of Answers



Eco-queer speculative fiction takes these foundations and builds upon them possibilities for living in beloved community during and after apocalypse - in other words, now. We've had visionaries describe characteristics of beloved community, but at the large scale at least, these remain mostly aspirational. We do know that there is no one way to build it, and there is no one architect who can design it. We need the imagination of all of us to be in conversation, and we need each other's company to muster the courage to try the things that emerge from that conversation. As Octavia Butler told the student who asked her what the answer was, "…there's no single answer that will solve all of our future problems. There's no magic bullet. Instead there are thousands of answers - at least. You can be one of them if you choose to be."[13] This body of work offers us multiple visions of beloved community, each offering a different expression of it, in much the same way that Adam Russell Taylor envisions for our current reality.

[13] Octavia E. Butler "A Few Rules for Predicting the Future," *Essence* Magazine, May 2000, 165.

Speculative fiction offers us the ability to say "What if," a necessary tool for imagining possible futures in the "real" world. In the lower stakes arena of fiction, like in other forms of art, we can explore a wide range of potential human responses to the need to rebuild society, including the creation of beloved community.

The beauty of the collections of stories we read lies in the variety of voices, offering a wide range of guidance and wisdom, almost always from the multiple perspectives that comprise the resistance. Joshua Whitehead notes this in his introduction to *Love After the End*: "The stories in this collection enumerate the beauty, care, deadliness, and majesty of Two-Spirited folx from a variety of Indigenous nations."[14] Not only do the authors represent communities marginalized by today's real world cultures of oppression, the protagonists hold the history of those oppressions in their fictional futures. Each story offers us a different possible answer out of the thousands of possible answers - a different "What If?" Some of the answers are grounded in Dr. King's imperative of non-violence, but many of them are not. Taken as a whole, I find this body of work to be consistent with what the Five Smooth Stones tell us about beloved community: that we must hear and heed the multiple voices of the oppressed as we work to create covenantal relationships / beloved community, and free ourselves (all of us) from non-covenantal relationships / unjust systems. Together, the stories offer a way to imagine societies that can be built, by all kinds of people, in covenantal relationships grounded in love, persistently using what power they can build to shape communities of justice, fed by an ultimate kind of optimism even when immediate optimism is beyond them. I found this especially true in *Octavia's Brood* and *Love after the End*, collections of stories set in the middle of larger stories. The arc in these books is not of one story, as a novel might be, but of threads between the stories, and it is in the threads that we find the insights into the creation and sustenance of beloved communities.

Many of the stories center on people in resistance movements, working to make change in worlds where the power dynamics and patterns are (still) rooted in oppression; these end

[14] Whitehead, 12.

before we know whether they will win, reminding us that we cannot really predict the ultimate outcome of our work, but the quality of the relationships we build and work from are important. The characters' relationships are complicated; we see many personal relationships, and even some communities, that can be described as mutual and free, although most of the societies in which these stories are set are not. Some of the communities appear to have had aspirations toward beloved community, that have fallen short, and the characters are working to restore them - or to simply survive. Some of the communities are actively nurturing beloved community in the midst of a society that continues to marginalize its members. The futures the stories imagine are grim, and yet, little bits of ultimate optimism drive the people of whose lives we catch glimpses toward action. They have not lost all hope, and they are the hope. As Joshua Whitehead writes in his introduction to *Love After the End*, "What better way to imagine survivability than to think about how we may flourish into being joyously animated rather than merely alive?"[15]

The stories show us how nurturing and beautiful covenantal relationships can be; they shimmer in these grim worlds in which people are held in non-covenantal relationships. Bao Phi's "Revolution Shuffle" begins with the banter between two comrades grounded in their shared cultural identity as they prepare to try to free people from a work camp; she reminds him that he is free to choose whether or not to join her. In Autumn Brown's "Small and Bright," Orion's mother gives Orion access to a survival kit as she is about to be exiled from her community, so that she might live to find connection with other communities. In "In Spite of Darkness," Alixa Garcia shows us the power of connection with each other, and reminds us of the beauty of beings who have evolved in relationship with their environment. In "Aftermath," Levar Burton shows us that relationship can happen in unexpected ways, and lifts up that connection to each other can be life-saving. In Leah Lakshmi Piepzana-Samarasinha's "Children Who Fly," Kumari is grounded in the work her mother did to pass along her family's gifts. Gabrielle Castilloux Calderon's "Andwànikàdjigan" (*uhn-dwah-nih-kah-djin-guhn*) explores "memory markings" on the people in A'tugwewinu (*ah-doo-gway-wee-noo*)'s village, physical evidence of stories on the skin of the listener - after the listener has consented to hear the story. In "Abacus," Nathan

[15] Whitehead, 10-11

Alder envisions a world in which an AI rat and a human boy develop a relationship aided by hologram technology and escape the restrictions of their world, in which queer love is normalized but AI-human love is stigmatized. We don't know what's next for them, but they end the story together.

The stories also remind us of Rebecca Parker's assertion that we will build beloved community with resources that are ready at hand. Alexis Pauline Gumbs does this explicitly in "Evidence," naming some of the tools we have to break cycles of domination and capitalism: creativity, courage, trust, while also showing us how oppression keeps us (all) too exhausted to effectively create liberation. Several stories tell us that intention isn't enough: Autumn Brown warns that even communities that have survived apocalypse can do harm in "Small and Bright," and Jaye Simpson explores the ethical implications of freedom for some at the expense of others in "The Ark of the Turtle's Back." Some of the stories explicitly highlight personal action: Kai Minosh Pyle's protagonist in "How to Survive the Apocalypse for Native Girls" reflects on the relationships and teachings and history of their people, concluding that they have to be an active participant in their survival: "the only way to survive the apocalypse is to make your own world,"[16] and Gabriel Teodros' "Lalibela" reminds us that the tools and strategies we use to make change will change us, too, and impact our relationship with our descendants. And some stories offer vehicles for personal sustenance. In "The Token Superhero," David F. Walker lifts up the importance of discovering what we mean to the communities from which we come, and of defining ourselves by our standards rather than by those of the oppressors. In "Black Angel," Walidah Imarisha brings our attention to the level of resilience needed to survive in a world in which white supremacy is unchecked. And in "Kafka's Last Laugh," Vagabond lifts up the liberating power of joy: "Laughter liberated them from the search for logic within the illogical. It validated for them what they had known all along - that the system was a joke. They laughed because the key to their freedom was always within them."[17]

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[16] Kai Minosh Pyle. "How to Survive the Apocalypse for Native Girls" in *Love After the End: An Anthology of Two-Spirit & Indigiqueer Speculative Fiction*, Joshua Whitehead, ed. Arsenal Pulp Press Vancouver 2023, 94.
[17] Vagabond. "Kafka's Last Laugh" in *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements*, adrienne adrienne maree brown and Walidah Imarisha, eds, AK Press and the Institute for Anarchist Studies 2015, 183.

In addition to wisdom on creation and nurturing of beloved community, the stories also offer some descriptive characteristics. It learns from our history: in "The Long Memory," Morrigan Phillips shows us that our history is shared and we must all bear its weight, and reminds us that forgetting dooms us to repeating our mistakes. And specifically, the mistake of colonization must be remembered so that we might be free of it: Adam Garnet Jones shows us how deeply ingrained the culture of colonization is in "History of the New World." It is long haul work: Tara Betts reminds us of this in "Runway Blackout," and that possible futures exist in which the world still isn't ready to acknowledge the worthiness of every human. But Bao Pho's "Revolution Shuffle" shows us that there will always be resistance to oppression. It is diverse and inclusive: in "Hollow," Mia Mingus reminds us of the strength that lies in our differences and shows us a terrifying consequence of forgetting this. And it is honest - one of the stories in Octavia's Brood is not fiction, but a debunking of a myth about the consumers of speculative fiction: our identification with the resistance movements imagined in the stories. In "*Star Wars* and the American Imagination," Mumia Abu-Jamal pushes back against our identification with the rebel-heroes in the stories, reminding us of our struggle for power and our current power: "we *were* rebels; we *are* Empire."[18]

Building on the Foundations: An Eco-Queer Vision

In a longer story, *A Psalm for the Wild-Built*, Becky Chambers creates a whole world that has done the work of building beloved community and is actively sustaining what they have built, offering us a beautifully inclusive vision. There is no resistance movement because this world has moved past the need for it. So instead of offering wisdom from the multiple perspectives of the marginalized, it brings possibilities that can exist when those voices have been heard and change has been made. We don't know what the change event was, though we do learn that it was cataclysmic: the monk quoted in the preface says that one of the clergy sects would say that their deity was "restoring balance before we made Panga uninhabitable for humans," and

[18] Mumia Abu-Jamal. "*Star Wars* and the American Imagination" in Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements, adrienne adrienne maree brown and Walidah Imarisha, eds, AK Press and the Institute for Anarchist Studies 2015, 257.

Dex learns that "Crickets, as it turned out, were extinct in most of Panga. While numerous species across all phyla had bounced back after the Transition, many others had been left in a state too fragile to recover. Not all wounds were capable of healing."[19] Dex later reflects that Panga had needed near-disaster to change: "There had been those who had seen the writing on the wall, who had made places such as this to serve as example of what could be. But these were merely islands in a toxic sea. The good intentions of a few individuals had not been enough, could never have been enough to upend a paradigm completely. What the world had needed, in the end, was to change everything. They had narrowly averted disaster, thanks to a catalyst no one could have predicted."[20] After the apocalypse, the humans of Panga took those examples and built them into a version of beloved community.

Like the glimpses of beloved community we caught in many of the short stories we read, Panga is built with a foundational emphasis on covenantal relationship. When the robots removed themselves, they made the Parting Promise with the humans, as Mosscap and Dex discuss:

> "I am here," it said, "to see how humans have gotten along in our absence. As is outlined in the Parting Promise, we are - "
> "Guaranteed complete freedom of travel in human territories, and rights equal to that of any Pangan citizen," Dex said, the atrophied memory kicking in at last. "You were told you could come back any time, and that we wouldn't be the ones to initiate contact. We'd leave you alone unless you wanted otherwise."
> "Precisely. And my kind would still very much like to be left alone. But we're also curious. We know our leaving the factories was a great inconvenience to you, and we wanted to make sure you'd done all right. That society had progressed in a positive direction without us."

And human society does seem to have done all right. The City (the only city) is "a healthy place, a thriving place. A never-ending harmony of making, doing, growing, trying, laughing, running, living."[21] There is freedom to pursue one's calling, and to change one's path when needed. Consent is normalized, and there's no evidence of coercion throughout the story. Curiosity is encouraged. There's a matter-of-factness around sexuality and gender that welcomes people to simply be who they are. Self care, comfort, and beauty are valued. Care for each other is

[19] Becky Chambers. *A Psalm for the Wild-Built*, Tom Doherty Associates New York 2021, 38.
[20] Chambers 128
[21] Chambers 5

valued as well, and seen as part of the work toward the functioning of the society as a whole: "a cup of tea may not be the most important thing in the world - or a steam bath, or a pretty garden… But the people who did actually important work - building, feeding, teaching, healing - they all came to the shrine. It was the little nudge that helped important things get done."[22] And care extends beyond humans to other beings and the earth, as seen when Dex apologizes to a bloodsuck they kill as it bites them,[23] when they have a small crisis over the harm they might do by walking off trail in the wild.[24] Resources are used sustainably: Dex's wagon has a greywater tank and a filter to clean it, and a digester for food scraps, and the City's buildings are made of organic materials that would decompose eventually, when they could be either recycled back into nature or repaired.

Robot society also seems to be built on agency, consent, and care. Mosscap describes how they gather (every 200 days), how they communicate and make decisions, and how they follow their interests by themselves or in groups of shared interests.[25] Curiosity is honored in this community too, and even honored: robots name themselves after the first thing they notice, like "Splendid Speckled Mosscap."[26] Stewardship is important, and they know their history: modern robots are "wild-built" from parts used over and over again in earlier robots, and they know their lineages down to the names and functions of all the other robots from whose components they're made; they actually discussed whether to repair individuals when they break down, or to use their parts to create new individuals, and decided on the reuse/recycle method to be consistent with natural processes.[27]

With its simple descriptions of a pair of societies that have intentionally rebuilt community after catastrophe, and its joy-filled conversations between the representatives of those societies, *A Psalm for the Wild-Built* offers an eco-queer vision of beloved community. Environmental justice and affirmation of queer identity aren't explicitly centered; rather, extractive

[22] Chambers 133-135
[23] Chambers 54
[24] Chambers 84
[25] Chambers 71-73
[26] Chambers 55
[27] Chambers 92-94

consumption and marginalization have been removed, much as the "triple evils" of poverty, racism, and violence are removed from society in the King Center's vision of beloved community, making space for environmental justice and queer identity to replace them.

What If?

Eco-queer speculative fiction offers multiple visions for beloved community for us to work backward from, because it draws from multiple voices and sources. And it offers the possibility that we'll use the resources we already have to build it. adrienne maree brown expresses this much more clearly than I ever could in the "outro" for *Octavia's Brood*:[28] "We hold so many worlds inside of us. So many futures. It is our radical responsibility to share these worlds, to plant them in the soil of our society as seeds for the type of justice we want and need… Science fiction is the perfect 'exploring ground,' as it gives us the opportunity to play with different outcomes and strategies before we have to deal with the real-world costs." Visionary fiction is the first of three tools she says were developed during the creation of this collection of stories, and she writes that it: "explores current social issues through the lens of sci-fi; is conscious of identity and intersecting identities; centers those who have been marginalized; is aware of power inequalities; is realistic and hard but hopeful; shows change from the bottom up rather than the top down; highlights that change is collective; and is not neutral - its purpose is social change and societal transformation… If we want to bring new worlds into existence, then we need to challenge the narratives that uphold current power dynamics and patterns."

I invite us into that imagining, as I close this exploration as I opened it, with art. I invite you to take a few moments to sit with the meme series on the first page and the possibilities it offers, and listen to this song by Toshi Reagon and Bernice Johnson Reagon's opera of Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*.[29]

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[28] adrienne maree brown and Walidah Imarisha, eds. *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements*, AK Press and the Institute for Anarchist Studies 2015, 279.
[29] "Octavia E. Butler's "Parable of the Sower: An Opera by Toshi Reagon and Bernice Johnson Reagon," found in the "Parable of the Sower: Chapter 25" episode of the Octavia's Parables podcast, https://www.readingoctavia.com/

A sower went out to sow her seed
And as she sowed
Some fell by the wayside
And it was trodden down
And as she sowed
Some fell by the wayside
And of it the birds did eat
A sower went out to sow her seed
And as she sowed
Some fell upon the rock
And as soon as it was sprung up
It withered away
Because it lacked water
It withered away
A sower went out to sow her seed
And as she sowed
Some fell upon the thorns
And as soon as it was sprung up
It withered away
There was nowhere to breathe
It withered away
There was no room to grow
It withered away
A sower went out to sow her seed
And as she sowed
Some fell on good ground
Some fell on good ground
From it the plants did grow
From it the flowers bloomed
And in due time
Came forth bearing fruit
A hundredfold - a hundredfold - a hundredfold - a hundredfold