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EXAMINING THE TRIBAL “OTHER” IN AMERICAN POST-APOCALYPTIC
FICTION

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ABSTRACT

Most post-apocalyptic novels feature situations in which protagonists and antagonists are extremely polarized. In this relationship, many antagonists are treated as the “other,” this practice, according to Edward Said, is used by one group to establish dominance over another. This thesis strives to examine the relationship between the protagonist and its tribal “other” in two works of American post-apocalyptic fiction, and suggests that this dichotomous relationship corresponds to key concerns in American political culture at the time of each work’s publication.

David Brin’s 1985 novel *The Postman* uses the “other” as a way to reinforce core American values, such as integrity and hard work; the protagonist, who takes on the role of a mail carrier and becomes a symbol for hope, helps to defeat the “other” and resurrects the post-apocalyptic United States. The “other” in *The Postman* is a group of barbaric anarchists who perpetuate anti-American sentiments. These sentiments, as it will be argued, were a major political concern in the United States during the late 1970s and early 1980s. By defeating this group of “others,” the American ideals that were valued (at the time of the novel’s publication) are reinforced and are perpetuated as necessary ideals that can save the United States from any danger that it may face.

Carol Emshwiller’s 2006 short story “Killers” uses the “other” as well, although to a different effect. Instead of promoting beliefs of the time period, the treatment of the “other” undermines this practice, as the protagonist, rather than the antagonist, is the

tribal “other.” Because of this inversion, this text seems to undermine the culture that promotes the ideals; the protagonist perpetuates the dichotomy through culturally ignorant slurs against the character that she believes to be the “other,” and when she is revealed as the other, her beliefs are challenged and undermined. This practice of creating and perpetuating an “other” seems to be challenged in “Killers” through the inversion of the “other” onto the Western character, especially when considering that “Killers” was written as a response to the American conflict in Iraq.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Term “Science Fiction”

It is important when examining the treatment of the “other” in post-apocalyptic science fiction to first understand the genre of science fiction itself. The definition and parameters of science fiction are hard to define, and have been the subject of much debate. In the foreword to his collection of short stories, Arthur C. Clarke differentiates science fiction from fantasy (as often the two genres are placed together as “Science Fiction/Fantasy”) by noting that “science fiction is something that *could* happen – but usually you wouldn’t want it to. Fantasy is something that *couldn’t* happen – though often you only wish that it could” (ix). As in Clarke’s analysis of the genre, both David Brin’s 1985 novel *The Postman* and Carol Emshwiller’s 2006 short story “Killers” create post-apocalyptic scenarios that suggest that the future United States is something that is undesirable and yet all too possible. Both Brin and Emshwiller create American societies reeling from wars that have ended each respective society as it had been previously established; these projections work to warn readers of various mistakes that are emphasized in the novels, ones that are projected to be well within the realm of possibility.

In his book *Future West: Utopia and Apocalypse in Frontier Science Fiction*, William H. Katerberg argues that science fiction does not merely show readers the sociological structures to which they are already familiar; instead, science fiction provides alternate realities of sorts that (among other motives) have the potential to expose some societal issue that the author feels is vastly important (for instance, consider some of the works of George Orwell) (9-10). Both Brin and Emshwiller provide potential American futures in their texts, and both authors use many tactics common to Orientalism in those futures. In their texts, both authors' uses of the "other" serve to showcase various ideas; in Brin, the treatment of the "other" reestablishes certain American values that Brin seems to suggest are important, and in Emshwiller, the treatment of the "other" challenges the practice of Orientalism.

Science Fiction as a Colonialist Genre

There are certain schools of criticism that are currently garnering much attention when examining science fiction as a genre or subset of literature, such as race and gender. However, the most useful focus to examine (regarding this thesis) is that of post-colonialism. There is a general consensus that colonialism is vastly influential when examining the early works of science fiction and their contexts. Indeed, in his book *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*, John Rieder notes that a great deal of early science fiction merely breathes new life into the principles of colonialism, and that the relationship in colonialist fiction "between civilization and savagery, and between modernity and its past" can be applied to science fiction (2-4; 26). In her book *Science Fiction and Empire*, Patricia Kerslake notes that science fiction is very invested in what is considered "outside," as it pertains not only to the "allure of the unknown and the

expansionist imperative” so familiar to colonialism, but also to the “possibility of gaining a new perspective on ourselves” through interaction with the “other” (10).

According to Edward Said, the “other” is a construct that is created by a dominant culture (such as the West) in order to separate itself from another culture (such as the East). It is more than a mere justification, however, for colonialism; Said argues that the attitudes put forth by Orientalism occurred far prior to colonialism. Indeed, Said’s theory of Orientalism, while dealing with colonialism, is more about the tactics used to justify one group’s perceived superiority over another. Said claims that there is a relationship between two cultural groups: it is one of dominance and subjected submission. The dominant group creates a set of traits that are ascribed to the subaltern group. These traits, while potentially slightly informed by actual traits of this group, are mainly a construct designed by what the dominant group wishes to see and what the dominant group wishes the subaltern group to be: the traits are often distinguished as the antithesis of what the dominant group feels it displays. This cements the perceived validity of the dominant group’s traits, and strengthens the dominant culture (*Orientalism* 1-39).

Brian Attebery attests to this tactic in his article “Aboriginality in Science Fiction,” stating that indigenous groups are often given traits that can be reduced to “savagery,” “even though the most disturbing savagery was often demonstrated” by the dominant culture (386). While Attebery notes that this phenomenon occurs in fiction in general, his assessment can be applied to the genre of science fiction. He says that science fiction is

often about the interchange between cultures, as seen, for instance, in stories of “first contact” (385).¹

According to Rivkin and Ryan’s assessment of colonialism, dominant races tend to treat subaltern races as “other,” suggesting, as Said argues, that the “other” is represented “as less civilized or less capable and as needing western paternalist assistance” (1072). In the works of fiction chosen for this analysis, the inferiority of the “other” is displayed through tribal motifs. Both David Brin’s novel *The Postman* and Carol Emshwiller’s short story “Killers” depict certain characters as “other” through the use of tribal traits. Brin establishes his protagonist as the ideal and assigns barbaric traits to his antagonists. Emshwiller uses this tactic as well, but, by the end of the story, readers are left to question who, if any one group, is truly the “other,” as both the protagonist, who is perceived as the dominant character, and the antagonist, who is established as the “other,” are both acknowledged as barbaric.

Brin’s novel and Emshwiller’s short story play into many of these key generalities that the practices of Orientalism consistently hold²; both authors use the practice in their works, and the use of the “other” works to suggest ideas connected to the social and political climate of the United States at the time of publication. In *Orientalism*, Said notes that it is imperative and unavoidable that one takes politics into account when discussing the relationship between Western civilization and the Orient (14). This thesis will suggest no different, as much of the subject matter for post-apocalyptic fiction is politically

¹ Although this type of science fiction story most likely would consist of stories of alien encounters, it also applies to the initial interaction between the unnamed narrator and Jal in Carol Emshwiller’s story “Killers,” as they are from disparate, or alien, cultures.

² While Said in *Orientalism* makes slight differentiations between Orientalism in different time periods (say, before WWI and after), he argues that the basic tenants of Orientalism stay the same when the practice changes (for instance, when the United States becomes a world power) (284).

motivated. Both of these texts put forth a different assessment and opinion of America's place in a conflict, which seems to be based on the political climate of the time. *The Postman* was written during a turbulent time in the United States when anti-American sentiments and complacency could be perceived as a potential threat and "Killers" during another, in which terrorism became the United States' foremost threat. Additionally, each text tells (American) readers something about themselves through the "other." Brin seems to argue that sticking to core American values is crucial for Americans to keep their identity and to prevent becoming the "other." Emshwiller, however, seems to argue that the American penchant for creating "others" has the potential to turn American citizens into the barbaric "others" themselves.

***The Postman* and "Killers" as Orientalist Texts**

David Brin's 1985 novel *The Postman* begins with an account of the "Doomwar," in which Russia attacked the United States. Although Brin sets his novel after the time period in which he himself wrote the book, he connects some of his novel's ideas with issues plaguing the actual United States. While the American people were occupied with the threat of Russia, more important in the novel was the disenchantment that many American citizens felt because of numerous events that facilitated an increasingly bleak perception of the country prior to the novel's publication. While Brin uses the Russians to start his post-apocalyptic scenario, his book focuses more on anti-American attitudes felt by the American people in the decade preceding the publication of his novel.

After the Russians are defeated in the novel, the main antagonist appears: the anti-American, feudalistic Holnists, led by a man named Nathan Holn (3). The Holnists stand for much of what Americans stand against; they create feudal societies, taking over towns

and turning the people they conquer into serfs. While the Holnists are depicted as the savage “other,” the group is made up of former American citizens: the Holnists are corrupted Americans, suggesting that all American citizens have the potential to become Holnists if they give in to the anti-American sentiments. The Holnists existed before the Doomwar and helped bring the nation to ruin.

Contrasted with this group are Gordon and his citizens of the “Restored United States” (87). Gordon, the protagonist of the novel, stumbles upon a postal worker’s uniform and inadvertently becomes a symbol for hope and resilience, as people assume that he is a representative of the resurrected United States. Gordon pretends to be an actual emissary of the United States, setting up a postal network that connects the isolated villages remaining after the Doomwar. After performing this identity for much of the novel, he eventually becomes this postman, finding it increasingly difficult to escape this identity. Although plagued with doubts, Gordon ultimately saves the American people he encounters, restoring the United States and the values it holds dear, such as hope and determination.

Brin effectively contrasts Gordon and his citizens of the Restored United States with the Holnists, even though both groups originate from the same place. The difference lies in their ideologies: Gordon and his followers work to re-establish the America they lost, while the Holnists hold anti-American sentiments and seek to destroy all traces of the former superpower, including its citizens. Because of this construction of the “other” and its contrary belief system, it can be argued that Brin is telling his readers that the United States will survive as long as pro-American sentiments (such as determination, and “persistent optimism”) are held in the hearts of its people (19).

My second text, the short story “Killers” by Carol Emshwiller, was written as a reaction to the American conflict in Iraq that was facilitated by the events of September 11, 2001: this short story was inspired by Emshwiller’s “objections” to the war and speculates what the aftermath would be “if such a war [came] to our shores” (Adams 257). Emshwiller’s story centers on a woman in an American town that has reverted to an isolated village because of a massive war that was fought on American soil. There are hardly any men left because of the conflict, and so women run the village. What men are left seem mostly to be in the mountains because they still believe they are fighting the war, and, at the start of this story, there is a man who is in the mountains and who is killing the other men. The protagonist (who is also the narrator) wonders what side this man is on, but then notes that she does not “suppose sides matter anymore” (259). The narrator hopes that it is her brother who had gone to fight, but, upon meeting the man, realizes that he is a man from the opposing side. She fluctuates between deciding to help him or kill him, and eventually decides to pass him off as a soldier from the United States. However, when the man begins to display an attraction to a Paiute woman, she exposes him for what he is, and the townspeople kill and eat him.

This act suggests that the protagonist’s group are just as “other” as the men fighting in the mountains, if not more so, as cannibalism is an extremely taboo and barbaric act. While it is not revealed if the men in the mountains have ever resorted to cannibalism themselves, the fact that the townspeople (including the narrator) are the characters committing the act makes the townspeople a savage “other.” Emshwiller, in her story, seems to use the construction of the “other” and her complication of who the “other” is to

suggest that perhaps the dominant or Western group is actually more barbaric than the cultures it ascribes that label to.

The main difference between the two texts I am analyzing is that the “others” are cast in different lights and, as a result, are used to suggest different conclusions. While in Brin’s text, the enemy is clearly defined and is always discernible from other characters, Emshwiller’s “other” is not so clear, as the narrator first mistakes the enemy soldier for her brother and then is revealed as the “other” herself. Brin seems to suggest that pro-American sentiments are correct and righteous, and that those who ascribe to them will justifiably prevail over those holding anti-American sentiments, thus saving the country. He appears to argue this by designating the antagonists as “other” and by proving the superiority of the pro-American protagonists over this group; the United States is saved from further harm by the end of the novel, and is on its way to a slow but optimistic recovery. Emshwiller seems to take note of this common tactic and invert it, suggesting that America itself is practicing the grotesque, and has become the “other” itself; instead of saving the country by implementing core American values and practices, “Killers” suggests that this actually destroys it.

CHAPTER II

THE IDEOLOGICAL “OTHER:” *THE POSTMAN*

David Brin’s 1985 novel *The Postman* depicts the post-apocalyptic journey of a man who finds a mail carrier’s uniform and inadvertently restores part of the American West to some of its former glory. Along the way this man (named Gordon) encounters different types of primitive towns and communes that have formed after the fall of the United States. During his travels, Brin’s character notices that people have an illusion about him and his uniform: they believe that he is a brave and heroic emissary traveling on behalf of the United States government and who is working to re-establish communication through a reinstated postal service. After beginning to play along with their notion of his identity, Gordon himself begins to be swept up in the idea of a “Restored United States,” and, by the end of Brin’s novel, becomes the hero they believe him to be (87). Gordon saves even the most prosperous and advanced of towns from an invasion of a group of former Americans who now hold anti-American attitudes and wish to destroy what is left of the United States.

Oscar de los Santos, in his article “Of Dystopias and Icons: Brin’s *The Postman* and Butler’s *Parable of the Sower*,” suggests that it is partially through icons such as the postman’s uniform and the eagle (the latter of which can be interpreted as a phoenix

rising from the ashes) that Gordon restores hope in the United States (114). Through his use of the postman's uniform, which reminds the people he encounters of the United States and its principles, and through his actions, Gordon not only restores the idea of the United States to its people, but also its ideals, such as hope and determination (Brin 1). Because he is a morally upright leader and because he works to better the lives of the people he protects, Gordon the Postman reestablishes the values of "integrity" and of working toward the "common good" in a post-catastrophe United States (Matarese 32; 15; Kaplan 16).

Historical Context

When analyzing Brin's novel, the time period in which it was published is significant. During the 1970s, America seemed to face many trials, such as Vietnam, Watergate, a hostage crisis in Iran, and an economy in crisis, plagued with gasoline shortages and inflation. American morale was low as the American people seemed to have no respite from their problems. The American's disillusionment was not helped when confronted by criticism from within, such as from President Jimmy Carter's 1979 "Crisis of Confidence" speech, in which he placed much of the blame on the American people, telling them essentially that the country was suffering because Americans were losing their values and confidence. He suggested that if Americans would only have faith in their country, the United States could rise again (386-89).

As accusatory as this speech was, Carter's correlation did appear to have some relevance in the years following—when Ronald Reagan took office in 1981, American confidence rose seemingly as the American economy did. Reagan had campaigned that he would help the United States restore itself to the strength it once had, and that the

country had the right (and the responsibility) to lead the world. Reagan's "unfailingly upbeat message contrasted sharply with the atmosphere of 'malaise'" that Carter's administration had exuded and helped to elect him; the American people "hoped that the ever optimistic Reagan would deliver them from the dark days of the late 1970s" (Patterson 147; 150).³

The American economy surged in the years immediately following President Reagan's election, leading some historians to argue that President Reagan was responsible for the economic surge (Bennett 497). Others more astutely contend that correlation certainly does not prove causation, and that it is hard to tell whether Reagan's policies actually brought about the improvement of the economy, as there are many variables to consider (Patterson 162-3). No matter the interpretation, the occurrence of America's economic restoration right at a time of renewed zeal would very likely have resonated with the American people. President Reagan did much to establish this restoration in American confidence, and was fashioned as a champion of American optimism (153). Brin uses this optimism in *The Postman* by having his main character right the wrongs of America's enemies and restore the United States and the dreams of its people, who work adamantly to restore hope, honor, and determination to the country.

In *The Postman*, Brin chronicles a futuristic American history: depression and rioting plagued the country, a "golden age" followed soon after, and then the cataclysmic Doomwar brought the country to its knees (31). While the fall of the country occurs in Brin's novel during a time of prosperity, Brin creates a major parallel in the novel that

³ Carter's 1976 campaign also used a "simplistic" message about Carter's plan to "ride into Washington as an outsider and clean up the country;" where they differed, however, was that Reagan's wording seemed to argue more for the inherent value and potential of the people of the United States, where the wording in Carter's plan seemingly opted for Carter to fix it himself (Patterson 147).

suggests what happened in the Doomwar: there are certain towns that live in luxury, and they have, to Brin, “suffered prosperity” as they are not prepared to safeguard themselves against any evil any longer (157). The fall of the United States in *The Postman* is connected to the arguments against complacency, and these parallel some of the atmosphere of the United States that American readers would have been familiar with at the time of the novel’s publication. The country had just recovered from a rough economic climate and its people from a great deal of disillusionment, with politicians arguing for people to believe in America and its potential to do great things (Patterson 147). This regained optimism is used in *The Postman*, and its use seems to suggest that perseverance and the active restoration of the American spirit by the American people is the catalyst that can repair the broken country time and time again, no matter when it may fall.

This optimism is to be found throughout American history. In her book *American Foreign Policy and the Utopian Imagination*, Susan M. Matarese argues that a great majority of American utopian fiction of the nineteenth century put forth the belief that America was greater than its European counterparts based on certain criteria: Americans enjoyed more freedom and less feudalism (15). The fiction of the nineteenth century argued that American values of “honesty, integrity, and industry” rightfully contrasted with European “uselessness, debauchery, and treacherousness” (15).

While Matarese argues that this tactic was extremely popular in utopian fiction at that time, this contrast seems, when looking at Brin’s novel, to be a method that is still utilized; although the enemy has changed over the centuries, the ideals have not. Indeed, Edward Said would agree that this tactic was common, although he makes his argument

fall more along the lines of the cultural domination of the East by the West (*Orientalism* 43). Nevertheless, both Matarese and Said argue similarly that it is common for one country or culture to assert its perceived authority over another. Brin uses this tactic in the form of restoring optimistic, American values and having those values succeed over those that would doom the nation, although, for Brin's characters, it is necessary to actively restore the hope that America valued for so long: being complacent weakens the remaining American people and threatens their demise.

In Brin's novel, it is this patriotic optimism and confidence in the strength of the American people that restores the United States of America, as Reagan proposed that it would in the 1980s. Brin himself notes that "in this era of cynicism, we need reminders of the decency that lies within. We are in this together" (qtd. in de los Santos 119). Gordon is characterized as having "persistent optimism," which Brin stresses is rare, and the people who follow him are morally upstanding, much unlike their enemies (Brin 19). This decency is stressed in *The Postman*, and it is because of the hard work and civility of his characters that Brin's novel ends optimistically.

Just as powerful are the myths put forward in *The Postman*. Gordon doubts his fabricated tales about the Restored United States, but eventually realizes that it is this hope that has willed a complacent nation to fight for itself and its people once more. Indeed, even he gains hope from the myths himself and realizes that without them, he (and everyone else) would die: the dreams of Americans for the future are what made the nation great, according to Gordon's revelation, and are worth living and fighting for (290).

America's Antagonists

The fall of the United States transpires 16 years before the beginning of the book, and readers enter in on Gordon's tale at the crucial moment in which he must physically and figuratively take on the mantle of the United States and become its hero (3). What has initiated the destruction of the country is an enemy classified by Brin as Russian.

Although it is never explicitly stated, it can be reasonably interpreted that this enemy that comes from "the Eastern Hemisphere" is Russian, as the main antagonist in the Doomwar is referred to as "Slavic" (27).

The Doomwar is the suggestion of what would occur if the Cold War (which America had been engaged in for the better part of 40 years) were to end by nuclear means. Readers would of course have connected the Doomwar with a battle with Russia, especially because of Brin's allusions to the "techno-war" being fought "at sea and in space," which harkens back to both the Cuban Missile Crisis⁴ and the Space Race⁵ (Brin 27; Bennett 350-52). It is perhaps unsurprising that Brin would make the beginning of the end reflect a battle "between superpowers representing divergent poles of political thought," as readers in the 1980s would have been prepared for this scenario (de los Santos 109). However, the Russians that start the Doomwar are revealed to be followers of the same anti-American teachings facilitated by the leader of the Holnists, Nathan Holn. Holnism began before the Doomwar, and Brin notes that the ideology took over in the East as "Slavic Mysticism" and caused the Doomwar, as it is after Russia's adoption of this ideology that the United States is attacked (Brin 247).

⁴ in which the United States, under President Kennedy, successfully prevented a nuclear war after Soviet Russia placed missiles within range of American soil

⁵ in which the United States faced deep fears about the tactical implications of Russia getting to space first

The Doomwar was short, and only a few of the world's nuclear weapons were used "before the Slavic Resurgence collapsed from within" (27). Although Brin characterizes this victory as "unexpected," and that there was much less damage than anticipated, the suggestion here is mainly that the Russians were incapable of fighting a war with the Americans: their own weapons did more harm to themselves than to the United States (27). Perhaps it was unexpected because everyone (in the novel and in America in the 1980s) would have deemed Russia a more formidable threat. However, Brin suggests here the idea that America's international antagonists are inept; America, in *The Postman*, was crippled, and yet its enemy was still incapable of victory. Said argues that this attitude is true of Orientalism, as the mindset is a practice in which the West believes itself stronger than the East (*Orientalism* 45). This victory, then, should not be that much of a surprise— it is just the speed in which the United States prevailed that is surprising.

No matter how inept America's Eastern foe may be in *The Postman*, the East is most decidedly an antagonistic force, as Brin also mentions the occurrences of nuclear fallout in the East from the Russians and "wind-borne" plagues in the West from Asia (27). However, while Brin initially sets up the traditional antagonism between the East and West, he then shifts the opposition of ideologies to two disparate groups within the United States itself.

The main antagonists rising from the Doomwar consist of former Americans who are members of the extremist Holnists. Unlike the Russians, who did not last long in antagonizing the United States, the American Holnists are a terrifying force to be reckoned with in the novel and are even classified as a disease. Brin states that despite all of the various plagues that besieged the United States, the country would not have been

completely broken if not for the Holnists: “and indeed, even the combination— a few bombs, some bugs, and three poor harvests— would not have been enough to ruin a great nation, and with it a world. But there was another illness, a cancer from within” (28). Brin later adds that the United States was recovering and cleaning up from the war and depression when “a few crazies” devastated its efforts (44). Those crazies, as Brin reveals, are those who carry sentiments and values opposite to what Americans stereotypically should hold; the Holnists create destructive, feudalistic societies and work to destroy the basic values ascribed to American life, such as freedom and equality. Readers learn that Nathan Holn ostensibly started the Doomwar, as his ideas became popular in Russia, prompting the country to attack. In the United States, the Holnists became a strong group by becoming the adopted belief system of “survivalists” (a name generally used interchangeably with Holnists in the novel) and of some of the government augments (military men who were genetically modified to be super-soldiers) (4).⁶

The Holnists have established a feudal society not unlike the type of oppressive society that the founding fathers worked so adamantly to abolish in the United States, and those that nineteenth-century American writers argued against (Matarese 71). Brin establishes the belief system of the Holnists through Holn’s biography of Aaron Burr, *Lost Empire*, which preaches the reasons why his ideals are far superior to Western thought. In his book, Holn tries to undermine the popular, key American figures of Benjamin Franklin, by calling him an “evil genius,” and Thomas Jefferson, by calling

⁶ With the detail of the augments comes the suggestion that the United States, in some respects, fueled its own demise. However, the country also created its redeeming force, as the second experiment with augmentation used men who were citizens, and not warriors, first; it is one of these men, George Powhatan, that helps turn the tide in the war against the Holnists and helps facilitate the broader restoration of the United States.

him a “conniver” (253). Holn praises the most rogue founding father, Aaron Burr, who was tried for treason after a “failed attempt to create a separate empire in the western United States” (“Burr” par. 1). Furthermore, Burr shot and killed Alexander Hamilton in a duel after Hamilton spoke against him during Burr’s campaign for the governorship of New York; Hamilton had called Burr untrustworthy (par. 1).

As Brin’s novel progresses, readers are told more and more about the Holnists and how much of a problem they are. When Gordon encounters actual Holnists, their presence is heralded by the screams of a tortured woman and is confirmed when he notices the torturers’ army greens and the numerous gold earrings in their ears. Brin connects the Holnist appearance with ruthlessness, as the earrings denote rank in Holnist camps (243). Said notes that the “other” is distinguishable because, to the West, identifying the “other” focuses on the idea of the strange as opposed to the familiar— traits that stand out would further establish an “other” as such (*Orientalism* 43).

While the army greens help to distinguish the “others” by making them easily recognizable, the attire also draws the “others” closer to the protagonists— the Holnists are dressed like American soldiers, and therefore, to some extent, look like what Americans used to be. Usually, however, the military would be presumed to protect American citizens (although this is something Emshwiller would possibly argue against), and so this inversion serves the idea that America is threatened from within.⁷ Indeed, the Holnists are led by some of the government’s augments, suggesting that some aspects of the military have been corrupted.

⁷ Also connected to this idea of an inversion of an American institution is the idea that Gordon takes on the uniform (and persona) of another American institution – the Postal Service – and saves the United States by doing so, connecting the towns together, which helps to restore hope and to protect the people from Holnists.

What makes the Holnists stand out even more, however, than their distinctive garb are the “grisly trophies” that many of them wear: ears and other body parts of their enemies are strung on necklaces and worn as proof of prowess in battle (176). Through this detail, Brin further establishes the Holnists as the “other,” as the trophies have a primitive, or arguably tribal, way of showing rank and authority. Brin’s depiction connects well with Said’s argument that the “other” is often seen as “barbaric” (*Orientalism* 150). Said often notes that Westerners make the “other” stand out as very different from Western culture, a device Brin implements often in his novel. There is no mistaking who the “other,” or enemy, is. Brin furthers this idea of the distinguishable nature of the “other” by making Gordon, upon discovering Holnists in this scene, shudder with revulsion, a suggestion not only that the men are disgusting (indeed, they are often described as hideously ugly) but also that these enemies are unnatural, and that Gordon’s own, human, body rejects them (114). Brin characterizes the survivalists in this way to suggest something that Said also touches on in *Orientalism*: the “other” is also often depicted as unnatural and “underhumanized” (150; 143).⁸

Connected to this is the idea that Brin establishes when he notes that “the very sight of Army surplus camouflage and gold earrings elicited a loathing response that was common nearly everywhere, like the way people felt about vultures” (116-17). In this suggestion of the primitive nature of the Holnists, Brin connects the vicious group to an animal that is generally hated and assigned sinister connotations. Said’s analysis in *Orientalism* suggests that this analogy was normal in the Orientalist ideology, as the Oriental (or “other”) was always seen as primitive, “depraved (fallen),” strange, hostile,

⁸ Indeed, the Holnists are depicted as unnatural, as some of them, as Gordon learns, are augments. Unfortunately, it was not only their strength that was intensified in the experiment: their basic natures were strengthened, and so the evil in these men was made that much worse.

and inhuman (40; 87). This universal loathing of the Holnists is almost instinctual to the good, or “normal,” people left in the United States, and is seen as a natural feeling against the unnatural enemy. In his book *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction*, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. addresses the concept of the “grotesque” within the genre, arguing that there are established norms of behavior and established laws of nature, and when something diverges from these norms, it is surprising and serves to “violat[e] the sense of stability” that characters have (182; 185). Indeed, much of what the Holnists do violates the stability the former American citizens have.

“Who Will Take Responsibility?”⁹

But for Brin there must always be balance, and his protagonist acts as the opposition to the Holnist mindset and tendencies. Gordon fought in the Doomwar in a militia, fighting against the Russians and then against mobs of holdouts (presumably survivalists) in their bunkers and shelters, as the humble American soldier who fought bravely for his country, and who is a hero. Gordon is set apart from all other antagonists at the outset of the novel, as Brin notes that Gordon faces, in other people, “a postholocaust callousness to which he’d never grown accustomed, even after all this time” (5). Brin suggests here, and in much of the book, that his protagonist holds on to the ideals and personality traits that were more prevalent before the war: Gordon is not a cold, heartless man. Perhaps it is because he does not become like the antagonists that he is the one rewarded with the postman’s uniform and with the task of bringing humanity and cohesion back to the former citizens of the United States.

⁹ This quote occurs many times throughout *The Postman* and is used much like a refrain that reminds Gordon of his duty to the American people – for if he, the most capable of people, will not save the United States when called upon, who will?

Gordon is an “everyman” type of hero, as Gordon, unlike the heroes of childhood stories, has a hard time setting aside “personal burdens of worry, confusion, angst, for at least the time when action impended” (18). In other words, Gordon is human, whereas, as Said notes, the “others” are often projected as the opposite (*Orientalism* 108). He is ranked as an intellectual, and although he fought in the militia during the Doomwar in order to protect the government, he is classified many times as a “rabbit,” suggesting that he is not a man known for physical prowess (Brin 8). Gordon is an unlikely hero, but is perfect for his new job, as his task is a humble one, great as it proves to be. As a mail carrier, Gordon carries the dreams and aspirations of a nation and connects the people of the United States once more, restoring the foundations of the country.

Indeed, Gordon is the man who does the most to reestablish the United States and what it holds dear. The refrain “who will take responsibility” constantly enters his mind and keeps him on track: there are many times in which Gordon would rather take the easy road and protect himself, but this refrain reminds him that he must work toward the common good and must protect others (266). In a rather odd and heavily symbolic dream sequence of Gordon’s, Ben Franklin (who is playing chess with a “boxy iron stove”) offers a fairly succinct assessment of what the nation needs:

we can establish constitutional checks and balances, but those won’t mean a thing unless citizens make sure the safeguards are taken seriously... It’s said that ‘power corrupts,’ but actually it’s more true that power *attracts the corruptible*. The sane are usually attracted by other things than power. When they do act, they think of it as *service*, which has limits (266-7).

Gordon is this man, as he works for the good of others rather than for his own power: whenever people defer to him, he would rather someone else take the responsibility. The idea that Gordon does not wish to take responsibility does not make him lazy, however.

He takes up the mantle of the postman first out of the need to survive, but eventually out of the knowledge that it is for the common good, and that it needs to be done in order to protect the people, whether he feels worthy of the task or not.

This task takes time for Gordon to complete however; Brin's novel showcases the transition of Gordon from an ordinary man to a symbol of hope. In the beginning of the novel, Gordon, while attempting to retrieve stolen items from bandits who ambushed him, stumbles upon what he initially thinks is a vision: "superimposed on his own image, a vacant, skeletal, death mask— a hooded skull grinning in welcome" confronts him (21). This image mesmerizes Gordon, who waits for what he thinks will be a message from death itself. It is then that he notices that the image he sees is really the skeleton of a postman who died in his truck. He takes shelter in the vehicle and changes his tattered clothes for those of the postman, which have been preserved from the elements.

This scene sets the stage for what Brin has Gordon accomplish in *The Postman*. As Oscar de los Santos notes, the eagle on the postman's uniform signifies a phoenix rising from the ashes (114). The scene in which Gordon first sees his face connected to a skull is a symbolized death from which Gordon is able to be reborn as a postman and as the man who will take responsibility and resurrect the United States. Indeed, after his initial shock at the skull image wears off, Gordon exhales and stands up: "it felt like unwinding from a fetal position— like being born" (22). This rebirth is not an easy or quick journey, however, as Gordon himself must perform his new postman identity for quite some time before he believes in it himself.

Although her theory focuses on gender identity, Judith Butler's theory on performance and identity aptly connects to Gordon's journey. Butler argues that gender identity is a

“repetition of acts” and that it is “constructed” (900-01). Gordon embodies this constructed identity, as he dons the postman’s garb and then, through the perception others have of him as a postman, begins to perform this new identity with increasing fervor. Indeed, while he begins to perform this identity for survival, by the end of the novel he realizes what a crucial role this position plays in the survival of the remaining American people. It is at this point that he stops questioning this identity, and fully becomes the postman.

Oscar de los Santos notes that the lies Gordon puts forth (despite, as noted earlier, the guilt he feels about telling the lies) are transformed into “variations of truth” and are therefore acceptable, especially because they “fuel positive ideals and humane progress” (113-14). Gordon feels pity for the people who wish to believe in the structure of the United States government, and yet it is through this pity that he first gets into the habit of carrying the mail and finally ultimately accepts and believes in his role (111-13). De los Santos takes his argument further by suggesting that it is the hope provided by the myth that helps re-invigorate the United States and its people. This myth is what helps bring the United States back (114).

Indeed, myths are the cornerstone of the redemption of the American people in the novel, as the myths are seen as necessary in order to revive the people’s vigor. The myths not only help re-inspire people, but they also help Gordon as well. He says that they need the myths to survive, and it is indeed the hope that the myths restore in the people that helps the American people defeat the Holnists. Gordon of course initially expresses cynicism toward such myths, but, by the end of the novel, he realizes that they are the cornerstone to the American restoration: he assesses that the new postal workers will

carry on the myth of the Restored United States, perhaps “until, by believing it, people [make] it come true” (320).

There are moments in the novel in which Gordon seems to be swept up in this identity before he fully accepts it. When Gordon comes across the feudal town of Oakridge, he is able to save it through this performed identity early on in his development into the persona of the postman. He seems detached after the fervor wears off, even as he knows that he has facilitated change. Nevertheless, in the heat of the moment, he is swept up in some of the enthusiasm of the townspeople. Said notes that many Westerners perceived it to be their job to rescue the “other” from what they saw as its primitive nature (*Orientalism* 121). Brin seems to twist this idea slightly, as it is the American people that he saves from falling into that primitive state. The townspeople of Oakridge were victims of feudal overlords: Gordon (although somewhat unintentionally, as he has not yet truly accepted his role as postman) helps them break their bonds and return to civilized life (94).

Gordon first encounters Oakridge after men steal medicine he discovers (but leaves behind in order to hide) then shoot at him. Gordon then spies on the town and overhears two men complaining about the leadership of the town. Brin informs readers that the attributes Gordon hears about are “features of feudalism” (72). Gordon is outraged not only because men from the town stole from him earlier, but also because he knows the resources will not be used for the common good in a town like this. Outraged, Gordon makes the decision to enter the town in an “audacious” and “spectacular” way: he creates false government documents and passes himself as the postman and inspector of the

region as designated by the United States Government (73).¹⁰ Although he still, until the end of the novel, feels that he is living a lie, he puts everything he has into the persona when reaching the feudal town.

Standing outside of Oakridge, Gordon faces death (as the mayor of Oakridge orders his men to shoot him) but holds on to his identity as a postman (one that he holds “at least in spirit”) and as a representative of the United States; subsequently, he triumphs (79). Although Gordon keeps thinking cynically about his officially assumed persona (calling the people who believe him fools and “simpletons,”) he himself gets caught up in the hope that they all rejoice in, and the hope does him almost as much good as it does the townspeople (81). Brin notes that Gordon the Postman “was an anachronism that the dark age had somehow missed when it systematically went about rubbing idealism from the world” (79). By the end of his stay, the townspeople speak to him of their disgust with the way the town is run, and Gordon realizes that the people of Oakridge will soon take it upon themselves to turn the town into a more democratic place. Gordon’s myth of a Restored United States helps to bring about change and re-establish the freedoms that were almost lost to the American people (de los Santos 114).

Said notes in *Orientalism* that it is through one’s encounter with the Orient that one is able to remake himself (166). This principle applies to Brin’s protagonist, as progressively through the novel he makes his performance of the postman more complete. Although at times it is through necessity, as when he fabricates papers to make himself convincing in Oakridge, he finally and completely understands the validity of his

¹⁰ Brin parallels the idea that the nation was founded on certain documents here, as Gordon drafts his own constitution of sorts, a “Declaration” within the “National Recovery Act” of the “Provisionally Extended Congress of the Restored United States” (87). In it, he even references the Bill of Rights, saying that it is to be upheld.

journey after the major battle with Holnist leaders at the end of the novel. It is then that he decides to make his role permanent. It is during his encounters with ideological “others” that the determined protagonist begins to assume his persona as a representative for (the seemingly lost) American dreams and values. Gordon continually finds himself inexorably pulled toward this identity. For instance, whenever he finds an opportunity to cast off this identity, something happens that makes him resume the performance: these occurrences are usually facilitated by the appearance of Holnist characters, and his continuation of the identity helps to thwart them. This signifies the importance of Gordon’s task, as it seems that the fates themselves (indeed, Gordon constantly addresses various higher powers) are leading him to his destiny.

The responsibility that Gordon assumes does not only apply to the black-and-white enemy that is comprised of those who foster anti-American sentiments and promote feudalism. Indeed, Gordon also must save many towns that are completely civilized; the problem with these towns is that they are so complacent and comfortable in their perceived safety that they do not believe that any danger can befall them. However, Brin appears to suggest here that just because a town seems safe from anti-American enemies does not mean that it is: complacency can be dangerous, and must be guarded against as well.

Gordon tries to warn the people of Harrisburg that a large band of Holnists is scouting the area and preparing to take over the region,¹¹ but they are slow to act because they have “been at peace much, much too long” and had forgotten danger (125). They townspeople finally act only after Gordon resumes his act as the postman once more.

¹¹ The Holnist threat seems very similar, in fact, to the trope of the invading barbarian horde, furthering the Holnists as the “other.”

When he does, the role “completely carrie[s] him away,” and he wonders if the “role was starting to get to him,” as he believed in his role momentarily and worked to rail against “little men” who were working to undermine a “high task” in fighting the Holnists and protecting the people (126-7). Gordon not only believes here that he is representing the United States, but he also becomes incensed against men who would passively let everything fall to ruin.

Indeed, although Gordon doubts himself at times, it is because of these complacent towns that he permanently takes on the role of the postman. Before Gordon came to the city of Corvallis, the people had hope, but it was not the correct hope: the people of the region were completely dependent on a supercomputer named Cyclops, although only the technicians knew that the computer actually was irreparably damaged and no longer functions. The people of Corvallis worshiped it and relied on it to protect and guide them. They became passive, and lived in too much luxury for too long to want to take the hard road: Brin refers to this in the novel as “suffered prosperity” (157). However, when the threat becomes imminent, Gordon takes charge and eventually it becomes clear that the more the people of the Willamette region learn to fight against the Holnists, the more they regain true hope. To symbolize this, some citizens begin flying American flags outside of their homes (160).

Brin takes time to offer reasoning as to why people might be trapped easily into a lifestyle or mindset of passivity: it is easier than having to be responsible for one’s own actions. While defending Corvallis, Gordon is captured by the Holnists and finds that he half-appreciates being a prisoner because he does not have the responsibility of taking care of his fellow citizens, something that he deems as filled with “complexities” and

“guilt” (237). While Gordon quickly recovers from this desire, Brin seems to suggest here than another cause of complacency (and danger to the American people) is the drudgery of merely scraping by in life. Brin abolishes all possibilities of this life being favorable, because in the scenes in which Gordon and fellow postal worker Johnny Stevens (an intensely American name for an intensely patriotic new recruit) are imprisoned, Brin provides bleak and highly negative descriptions of all aspects of the Holnist camp. Upon observation of the camp, Gordon notices that the people scurrying about the town are silent, starved, and abused. The only people who are well-fed are the women who are sex slaves to the Holnist elite, and even they are forced to work as laborers. The other prisoners in Gordon and Johnny’s cell have been under Holnist abuse for so long that Brin designates them “long past human” (239).

Based on what they experience and see of the Holnist commune, and because of their own inherent strength and goodness, Gordon and Johnny fight to keep their humanity intact and refuse to break under the Holnists. Johnny, an idealistic young man who wholeheartedly believes in the United States and later sacrifices his life for it, is also part of Gordon’s motivation to keep up his postman persona: it is for people like Johnny, and for their hope, that Gordon continually takes responsibility and helps to build a better America. Additionally, however, Gordon finally comes to the realization that this hope for a “Restored United States. –For a *Restored World*” was not just for the people he worked to help– this hope was for him as well, and was what kept him alive (290).

A More Inclusive Restoration

This Restored United States proves to be much more inclusive than the country was at its first founding, although parts of the new foundation parallel the old. In *Future West*,

Katerberg explores the science fiction stories that are set in the American West. In his analysis of Larry Niven's post-apocalyptic novel, *Lucifer's Hammer*, Katerberg notes that "a small group of enlightened survivors defeats [a] barbaric horde" of cannibals (77). Katerberg connects this to "the American history of destroying the Indians (the barbarians of their time)" (77). This suggests that Brin also may be utilizing a colonialist tactic significant to American history: Gordon is civilizing the wilderness. It is only fitting, then, that this connection be made to the trope of ridding the new Eden of the tribal "other."

Brin alters the tactic to one of ideology and not of race, however, as characters that have been formally seen as outcasts or "others" are now embraced as long as they hold pro-American values and sentiments. Those who do not share those sentiments, in this scenario, become the barbaric "other." For example, Philip Bokuto is African American and is not only treated equally but also is celebrated as one of the best men in Gordon's militia. He is a determined and skilled fighter, and bravely faces the Holnist augments, sacrificing his life for the cause. He is Gordon's right-hand man in the fight against the Holnists, and the only disparaging comment made about his race is by a Holnist. This suggests that Brin's idealized new American society is one that is much more inclusive and that is not focused on the trivialities the old nation was more concerned with.

Not only are men of different cultural and racial backgrounds celebrated as equals in *The Postman*, but women are also arguably more equal in the novel as well. Although Brin assesses that women live a difficult life in the post-cataclysmic United States, his female characters are some of the strongest in the novel, and by the end of *The Postman*, are respected for being so strong. The female characters (such as Dena, a feminist and

Gordon's love interest) are the catalyst that motivates George Powhatan to rejoin the fight against the Holnists, even though his region of Oregon is safe. Female recruits infiltrated Holnist camps by becoming sex slaves to the Holnist warriors, and, on a preordained night (known as the infamous "red night of knives"), killed the men in their beds (315).

This proved to be the catalyst for a great deal of the resolution in the novel, and sparked a myth that drove women throughout the region from complacency. Being a woman was not a limitation in this new United States, and because of that, by the end of the novel, women are fighting in the army and are no longer merely scouts, having earned their place because of their determination and potency. The women take partial responsibility for not helping prevent the Holnists from taking power, as Dena argues that women should have worked to "cull out the mad dogs" before the war started, instead of being complacent (226). By the end of Brin's novel, the women vow to never let that happen again.

George Powhatan (who is connected with Native American imagery with his "beaded headband" and long hair) is respected as a leader of a neighboring town and, after realizing the futility of his pacifism in a time of war, is credited as one of the main catalysts in defeating the Holnists (211). It can be argued that Powhatan is actually the man who saves the United States from the Holnists as he is the one who physically kills the Holnist general. However, because of the novel's focus on Gordon and his values before and after this event, readers seem to be led to the conclusion that Powhatan merely helps to facilitate the change Gordon works for.

Powhatan, it is revealed, is an augment as well, and works to counterbalance the strength of the evil characters. The United States, according to the novel, made a grave mistake in creating augments out of warriors, as they eventually thirsted so much for battle that they joined the Holnists, destroying the country. The country, near the end, however, “rediscovered wisdom” and chose the right people to receive augmentation (304). This again suggests that there is a polarity between good and evil characters: Powhatan is characterized as a man in this battle, while the Holnist as a beast, cementing once more the idea of the “other” (303).

This final battle between General Macklin (the Holnist leader) and Powhatan is full of imagery and can be seen as an allegory for the Revolutionary War, in which the United States won its independence and became a nation. The battle occurs between two superpowers (or supermen)¹² and turns the tide in the war against the Holnists. Powhatan defeats Macklin by throwing him into a canyon, which is reminiscent of the biblical trope of casting the evil out of Eden.

The right men to receive augmentation, according to Brin’s novel, were not the “warrior type[s]” but the Cincinnatus characters (304). Powhatan definitely fits this archetype, as he takes responsibility when he must (much like Gordon) but would rather be a citizen when his task is complete. Although there is most definitely a connection between George Powhatan in *The Postman* and the Powhatan of early American history, Brin creates in his character a greater connection to George Washington than to the Indian chief, although, much like Chief Powhatan, George Powhatan was underestimated by his enemies (par. 1). Powhatan plans to return to his home when the Holnists are

¹² In the introduction to Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Elisabeth Forster-Nietzsche characterizes Nietzsche’s superman as a “strong, mighty, and magnificent man, overflowing with life and elevated to his zenith” (Nietzsche par. 7).

defeated, although he could rule most of Oregon if he so chose. Brin's character is reminiscent not only of Cincinnatus, who led the Romans to victory and then returned to his farm, but also George Washington, who left his seat of power after serving two terms as president of the United States. This seems to be one of Brin's points, however, as public servants must give all they can to the cause, and not take more than their share (Brin 305).

The Westward Expansion

At the end of the novel, Gordon fully becomes the postman that everyone (and now he) believes in. Upon leaving the civilized world in search of more towns to save, he finally does not look back, and with complete confidence and optimism he moves on to help more former American citizens become Americans again, this time in California.¹³ In his analysis on utopian and dystopian fiction, Roger Schlobin asserts that many science fiction authors dealing with the American dream create tales that reflect a certain amount of disillusionment, and that many of them are centered on California (13). The fixation with California in conjunction with the American dream is, as Joan Didion asserts, a reflection of our need to move westward and succeed in and conquer what we find (199). Brin, however, restores faith in the American dream by choosing to make Gordon continue his westward journey with a great deal of optimism. On the last page of the novel, Brin writes: "*I'll bet they have electricity in California too*, Gordon hoped. *And maybe...*" (321). The connection to hope and optimism here is telling when working to differentiate Brin's message from perhaps some of the more pessimistic attitudes of the

¹³ Actually, Brin's protagonist is always travelling west as he has no idea what else to do (he automatically falls back on the common trope of westward exploration and expansion that was common in American history).

time period, as Schlobin suggests science fiction literature generally is comprised of.¹⁴ Brin's character successfully revitalizes the freedom and desire for Americans to dream and subsequently saves the country from ruin. His move westward is one of confidence and promise, because America, to Brin, is becoming safe again.

Brin invents a novel passage that Gordon half-remembers early in the novel, noting that no disaster is never "so devastating that a determined person cannot pull something out of the ashes – by risking all that he or she has left" (1). Brin's foreshadowing is obvious, to be sure, but no less significant for it— Brin sets his reader up for grand ideas about what may be left to salvage after the United States crumbles. Gordon does not disappoint, as it is the very humanity and identity of the American people that he rescues.

¹⁴ Although Schlobin's piece was written at least a decade after *The Postman*, he references many works that are more contemporary to Brin's.

CHAPTER III

AN INVERSION OF THE “OTHER.” “KILLERS”

Author Carol Emshwiller is certainly no stranger to post-colonialist literature, as many of her works show; a great deal of her stories are about dominance and submission, much like the core of Said’s argument in *Orientalism*. For further reading of Emshwiller’s more colonialist works, her 2002 novel *Mount* and her 1992 short story “Venus Rising” are fascinating examples of the interaction between native groups and their invaders. She generally works with the texts by alternating between the point of view of the submissive group and the dominant, although her tendency is to tell the story mainly from the submissive group’s viewpoint.

This duality in the narrative, however, provides readers with ample room to understand both the colonizer and the colonized. This implies that the concept of colonization is not as black-and-white as many would suggest. In “Venus Rising,” for example, a character named Venus is the exotic “other” to her antagonist, Zuesa, who attempts to create a new population with her, much to her confusion and opposition. Emshwiller adeptly shows both sides of this conflict and their misunderstandings with and confusion about each other; these cultures clash and are never fully reconciled. In these stories, it is easy to understand that the force placed upon one group in order to

make it submissive is a negative one, although readers also are able to relate to the colonizer and understand his ignorance: many of her dominant characters seem to be just as confused as her submissive ones.

Emshwiller's 2006 story "Killers," however, is different in that Emshwiller uses one point of view throughout the story: readers only hear the voice of the unnamed protagonist. This technique makes interpretations of her story slightly more complicated than in her other works; while her message about the ills of colonization remains consistent, the fact that readers only see one side forces them to rely upon only one interpretation and to analyze the situation using only one point of view. This story, like many of her others, stresses the negative aspects of one group trying to take over another, but it soon becomes apparent that the groups themselves are not so clear. Instead of fluctuating between the perspectives of the protagonist and antagonist, Emshwiller instead changes the reader's perspective of the protagonist (the unnamed narrator), which alters the idea of who the "other" really is in the story. This is Emshwiller's point, however, as she tricks her readers by first suggesting that her protagonist is interacting with her enemy (the "other") and then by revealing at the end of the story that the protagonist is actually just as "other" than the antagonist, if not more so.

In Emshwiller's story, the unnamed narrator is an American woman living in a small American town in the end stages of a war that has apparently caused ruin to the country. The war seems to be generally over in her region, although there are still pockets of fighting. The narrator mistakes a rogue soldier for her long-lost soldier brother and takes him in. She realizes quickly that he is not her brother and is actually an enemy soldier, but begins to develop feelings for him and works to pass him off as an American soldier.

Her desire for him is mixed with her desire to control him as the “other.” When the soldier named Jal (whom she renames “Joe”)¹⁵ displays his preference for a Paiute woman from a neighboring village, the narrator, in a fit of jealousy, exposes Jal as an enemy soldier, bringing the wrath of the town upon him. The townspeople subsequently hang Jal and eat him.

“Killers” becomes even clearer when Said’s *Orientalism* is used as an interpretive lens: Emshwiller seems to argue in “Killers” that the culturally ignorant, “us versus them” mentality has not gone away. Emshwiller’s protagonist is clearly well-versed in the racist dogma that has been impressed upon her: she reiterates ignorant, all-encompassing comments about the “other” that are representative of much of Said’s concept of Orientalism. Emshwiller, by the end of the story, makes her narrator and the American villagers commit a more barbaric act than the enemy soldier ever is depicted of doing: yes, Jal kills other soldiers, but he does not eat them. This establishes the unnamed, American narrator as more “other” than her foreign enemy. With this comes the suggestion that the West has the same savage tendencies that it ascribes to its “others.” Emshwiller seems to suggest that it is because of the Americans’ Orientalist attitudes that they have these traits, as in “Killers,” the war comes to American soil in reaction to the wrongs committed by the United States.

“Killers” is a post-apocalyptic short story written in speculation of what the United States would be like after an invasion— as it was written as a response to the American conflict in Iraq and as Emshwiller attaches certain stereotypes to the enemy invaders, it

¹⁵ Although the narrator calls the soldier “Joe,” his initial choice was “Jal” and so he will be referred to as such. As one of Emshwiller’s main points is that his identity was changed by the narrator, this paper works to identify that problem— it seems only fitting to resume the use of the name that Emshwiller has the soldier choose for himself.

can be gleaned that this invasion was orchestrated by an enemy of Middle Eastern descent (Adams 257). However, Emshwiller leaves this vague throughout her story, as well as the cause of the war. This suggests that this war could have been orchestrated by many different enemies, for many different reasons; one interpretation of “Killers” is that the United States has brought war upon itself through its culturally ignorant attitudes and actions, which is supported by the vagueness of why and by whom it occurred. Through the vagueness of the enemy, “Killers” seems to suggest that this practice could facilitate hostility from a vast number of cultures and cause the downfall of the United States.

The Protagonist as Former American Citizen

Emshwiller carefully and subtly works to make readers recognize the protagonist and her surroundings as American; the story, although it initially takes a bit of digging to ascertain, is definitely set in the United States. The narrator describes the land outside of her backyard as land from “the Department of Water and Power, after that Forest Service land, and then the John Muir wilderness” (258). This title can be connected to American governmental agencies, although the idea that many countries could have similar-sounding department names should not be overlooked.

Emshwiller’s reference to John Muir is more significant, as Muir was instrumental in helping with the acquisition of land for national parks, suggesting that, if Muir’s wilderness is in the narrator’s backyard, it is most likely American wilderness (“Muir” par. 2-3). Also in the narrator’s backyard (or, more accurately, in part of the town that people abandoned) are a “Vons and Kmart” which are closed and have been looted at this point (Emshwiller 258). This could be a symbol for American capitalism falling to ruin although many American companies set up shop globally.

Perhaps the best indicators, however, of the setting of Emshwiller's story are in the geographic references casually made by her characters. When the narrator goes back into town, she notes that the heat is unbearable, and is like "Death Valley in summer" (263). During the conversation between the narrator and Jal in which they decide to pass him off as an American soldier to the townspeople, Jal suggests many plausible news stories to relate to the townspeople of so that he can blend in. He suggests "how about, way up in Reno, they found a cache of ammunition so they can clean up their old guns and use them again?" (265). The allusion to Reno sets the town in or fairly near to Nevada (much like the Death Valley reference does), and is furthered when readers connect these references to the repeated mention of the desert sand and grit that enters the townspeople's homes: for example, Jal tracks sand into the house upon his invasion into the unnamed narrator's home.

Due to the location of the story, the narrator is established as a (former, perhaps, such as in Brin's story) American citizen, especially as, early on in "Killers," Emshwiller notes that the narrator had grown up in the town the story is set in. It follows that her "other" is a man from the invading army. By establishing the unnamed narrator as an American it presumably follows that the antagonist, Jal, who is a member of the invading army, must then be her "other." Emshwiller questions, by the end of the story, however, which character really should be seen as the "other."

The Foreign (yet Familiar) Other

The enemy invaders in "Killers" are treated much like other Western enemies; there are striking parallels to the tactics and dogmas that Said outlines in *Orientalism*. As the narrator recounts the history of the war that threw the United States into chaos, she

quickly pits the enemy as the “other” in certain, predictable ways. The narrator insults the enemy, saying that they were less sophisticated and were “weak and low tech;” the only reason that the enemy won, according to the narrator, is because they had greater numbers and depleted the Americans’ resources (259). The tactics of insulting and of focusing on the weaknesses and “otherness” of the enemy is a common one; in Brin’s *The Postman*, the initial enemy, Russia, is seen as inept. Said notes that this political tactic is used to stress the difference from and dominance over a certain group (*Orientalism* 43-45). Furthermore, these depictions are not concerned with factuality; they are used in an attempt to establish the dominance of one group over its “other” (6).

The enemy “other” is also dehumanized in “Killers” through the American re-use of internment camps. The narrator notes that the enemy was among the American people even before the war began (much like the Communists were during the Red Scare or the perception that Japanese-American men, women, and children were a threatening presence after the attack on Pearl Harbor), and that no one knew who to trust. In “Killers,” the narrator notes that there were no clear-cut sides to the conflict because of the enemy infiltration.¹⁶ To remedy this, the United States rounded up every “other” it could find (presumably only those who were of or appeared to be of Middle Eastern descent, although Emshwiller leaves this slightly and effectively vague) and placed them in internment camps; however, as the narrator notes in one derogatory aside, “you can’t get them all” (259).

Said notes, in his 2003 preface to *Orientalism*, that “the same justification for power and violence” is still occurring after so many years (xxi). Emshwiller uses internment camps, which suggests that ideologies and practices like the ones Said highlights could

¹⁶ This differs from Brin, who makes it painstakingly clear who the “other” is in his scenario.

easily still exist; the use of such camps should resonate with most audiences, as they are a dark and very racist spot on American history, one that many people would like to forget. Emshwiller here seems to suggest that Americans have not learned from their history and are repeating the same atrocities that they were guilty of before— nothing seems to have changed, as internment camps are still a glaring possibility.

The enemy invaders are described as men with “black eyes and hair and olive skin” (Emshwiller 259). While people of many cultures exhibit these physical traits, the enemy is most likely Middle Eastern because of Emshwiller’s intention for this story to be a reaction to the American war in Iraq. Although America is extremely multicultural, the narrator makes it seem as if there are merely two types of people: white Americans¹⁷ and Middle Eastern “others.” This is an extremely narrow-minded assumption, and works with the overall theme of racism and cultural stereotyping in the story. The narrator notes that eventually the camps were left unguarded because of the length of the war and the depletion of resources, and that the prisoners of the camps simply walked out.

Emshwiller’s protagonist is overly reductive about cultural diversity in the story, but, of course, that seems to be the point of the story, as it is a criticism of the very nature of this cultural bigotry. Emshwiller establishes her American narrator as racist (she has no qualms about the internment camps, for instance), and then provides hints that her narrator is wrong. Through this is the suggestion that the narrator, who could be considered an unnamed and generalized representative of the American people, represents the ill-conceived mentality that is shared by many Americans. Emshwiller, it seems, could be suggesting that the narrator is merely following in the footsteps of many

¹⁷ It can be assumed that the protagonist is white, as she mistakes a Middle Eastern man for a tanned version of her brother.

generations of Western (and American) ideologies and practices. Said argues that ignorant politicians, for instance, work to establish and re-establish these “popular caricatures” of the “other” whenever an important issue arises that threatens the order of the Western world (*Orientalism* 108). This ignorance is the problem and is contagious: it has the potential to cause more conflict.

This ignorance, according to many critics and theorists, has gone on for centuries. Although her article “Nuclear Holocaust as Urban Renewal” focuses more on the theory that authors of post-apocalyptic fiction attempt to facilitate new growth by razing the problem areas (such as corrupt cities) to the ground and starting over, Martha Bartter makes a few comments that connect well with what Emshwiller appears to work toward in “Killers.” Bartter notes that science fiction authors writing post-apocalyptic stories work to create more ideal societies, but also that the practice it is not generally realistic: human nature, to Bartter, hardly ever changes, and humans seem to repeat the same mistakes time and again (149; 156).

In “The Clash of Civilizations: Samuel P. Huntington, Bernard Lewis, and the Remaking of Post-Cold War World Order,” John Trumbour suggests that after the Cold War, the United States looked for a new enemy and found it in the Middle East. While this is certainly true, he also suggests that politicians are mainly the people who start the polarization between the United States and other cultures. He seems to give mankind more credit than Said or Emshwiller does, as while he notes that some argue that the masses are responsible for the staying-power of this ideology, he mainly overlooks the idea that the dogmas and ideologies were already in place and were merely magnified by the catalyst of political attention (91). Said argues and Emshwiller seems to posit as well

that the ignorant ideologies are already in the consciousness of the Westerner, and emerge all too easily.

Emshwiller reinforces the idea of cultural bigotry being an unchanged phenomenon through her narrator's repeated assessment of Jal. The narrator's thoughts and actions highlight many physical and cultural traits that are different from hers. The unnamed narrator differentiates between herself and the "others" fairly forcefully, perhaps out of national identity, but presumably mainly out of well-practiced ignorance. Indeed, much of what the narrator says about her enemy seems to be in line with rehearsed, racist dogma; in his preface to *Orientalism*, Said notes that not only is the same justification being used to keep racist ideologies intact, but "the same demeaning stereotypes" are being used as well (xxi). The narrator constantly treats Jal as if he is dangerous; while that in itself is not odd when considering that the two characters are on opposing sides in a war, the way in which the narrator does this is significant, as she phrases her suspicions in a way that mimics what Said argues. For example, when going hunting and leaving Jal alone in her cabin, she thinks to herself that he could retrieve his weapon and kill her, but that she "might as well give him a chance to show what he is" (263).

The narrator also differentiates the two sides of this conflict through appearance, which reflects the attitudes necessary to round up anyone who looks a certain way and condemn them to internment camps. When she first meets Jal, she notes that his eyes are "as black as the enemy's always are. Eyebrows just as thick as theirs" (261). She notes that he is dirty, and that she considers killing him for it, because after taking care of her dying mother, whom she seems to feel no affection toward, she thought she "was finished with disagreeable messes" (262). This scene is telling, as not only does she notice

immediately that Jal is an enemy soldier, but she immediately connects him with what she is familiar with: her family. She often connects Jal to her brother as well, especially because they are (or were, as readers never learn the fate of her brother) both soldiers. Eventually the narrator changes Jal's appearance, and during this ritual she begins to feel an attraction him, suggesting, however, that the differences are negligible and easily put aside or at least hidden through small cosmetic changes.

The narrator is vehemently against the "other," and yet there are multiple times in which she connects the enemy soldiers to the American soldiers, showing just how gray (rather than black and white) the war is: a refrain of the story is the idea that nothing seems to "matter anymore," which Emshwiller uses to suggest that the war has gone on for so long that the sides have forgotten what they were fighting for in the first place (259).¹⁸ The narrator wonders if the war is still being waged, and if it is not, if the men in the mountains realize it. She does this, however, without ever actually coming to the realization that the two groups of men are alike in many ways. She does note this, but readers never see her gain insight into her own ignorance. The unnamed narrator merely recites blanket statements about her enemy and about what "they" do, even when this does not seem to match up with what is actually happening.

A prime example of the unnamed narrator's rote recitation of dogma (and of her ignorance of the implications that reality imposes on these beliefs) occurs when the narrator notes, early on in the story, that there are "crazies" up in the mountains, and that one of them is killing some of the men who live in the mountains (259). She expresses the hope that the man murdering the other men is not "one of our side. Though I don't

¹⁸ Indeed, even in the beginning of the war, according to the narrator, the sides were not so clear, as she assesses that "wars aren't like they used to be— with two clearly separated sides," indicating that the sides may have been difficult to distinguish even from the start (259).

suppose sides matter anymore” (259). This phrase suggests that she is aware that there are most likely battle-scarred men of both sides up in the mountains, and that sides do not matter anymore. Perhaps this is foreshadowing, as at the end, Emshwiller reveals that the narrator is just as “other” as Jal is.

The narrator’s ambivalence in “Killers” is much different from the clear-cut differentiation of the “other” in *The Postman*, and exhibits one of the main differences between the authors; while Brin seems to use the “other” to establish his ideas regarding American values, Emshwiller seems to use this same attitude about the “other” to tear the practice down and condemn it. The narrator’s assessment of the lack of sides in the conflict never seems to enter in on the narrator’s mindset or her actions; she still repeats many ignorant things about the “other” throughout the story, which suggests that she has not learned anything from these assessments of what is going on around her, even though she herself notes that perhaps the sides are indistinguishable.

Although Jal admits that he is one of the invading soldiers, and although the narrator is vehement in her appraisal against the “others,” Emshwiller pointedly suggests that he is not that different from the American soldiers through her assessment of his appearance. His overgrown beard suggests that he has been in the mountains fighting for too long, suggesting that the soldier is a determined and seasoned enemy. However, Jal’s unkempt beard, bad teeth, and tanned skin, as the narrator briefly notes, could have happened to both sides as a result of being out in the elements for too long. Nevertheless, the way in which Emshwiller has the narrator describe his appearance suggests her opposition to the “other:” “I can’t tell if he’s a brown man or just weather-beaten, sunburned, and dirty” (261).

Even while showing the possible similarity among the soldiers that presents itself, Emshwiller still encases it in the narrator's ignorance. Through this analysis by her narrator, Emshwiller only briefly brings attention to the similarity between the American and enemy soldiers, as it is enough that her reader catches the problem with the narrator's ignorance and sees the flaw in her thinking. And that is part of the point: despite being reminded (often by her own thoughts) that she and the soldier are not all that different, the narrator does not listen to reason and pits herself as a polar opposite to the "other."

Despite the similarities, the narrator still feels that she must change the soldier enough to pass him as an American. She is attracted to Jal, but she feels that she must make him acceptable and familiar to her— there is also the suggestion of ownership in this, as she changes him as she sees fit. The narrator changes two major aspects of Jal: his name and his appearance. When the narrator asks for the soldier's name, he responds with a name that is unacceptable to her: when she tells him to pick a name for himself and he chooses "Jal," she immediately counters "make it Joe" (263). His name sounds foreign to her, as it should with many readers, especially when compared to an all-American name like Joe. In insisting that he fit in with her culture, she anglicizes Jal's name, forcing him to assume an identity more congruent with hers. What furthers this "otherness" is the narrator's thought immediately following this exchange: "I don't trust him" (263). Emshwiller effectively establishes Jal's opposition to the narrator here, furthering this idea by suggesting that she feels she cannot trust him.

When the narrator changes the soldier's appearance, she does this (somewhat consciously and somewhat unconsciously) to make him fit in and be less "other" to her and her group. She bathes him, burns his old, tattered clothing (except for his hat), and

shaves his beard and hair. She takes control of him by doing this while he is first half-conscious and then asleep; because he is not in control of himself, she is able to take her time with his hair, trying out multiple styles before shaving his beard completely and cutting his hair very short. This dominance is pleasing to her, and is here that Emshwiller begins to suggest the narrator's attraction to Jal: it is when she is bathing him and cutting his hair (while he is "half asleep") that she expresses her enjoyment of these tasks and of his body (262).

After the changes, Jal meets the townspeople and fits in quite well. While his successful passing can be interpreted as either the narrator's skill of disguise or his skill at performing this new identity, it is much more likely that he passes as an American soldier because the two groups are not all that different. Indeed, it takes not only the physical evidence of his discarded hat and his crossbow but also the fact that he tries to escape to seal his fate. Otherwise, people might never have believed that he was an enemy soldier. The narrator works to disguise the soldier so that he can live among the townspeople, and it is partly because she begins to develop feelings for him. She may not be disguising him merely for his own protection— it is possible that she would rather think of him as one of theirs, and so it could be she who needs the disguise most. She is attracted to Jal, but must make him Joe (and therefore more Westernized and familiar) in her mind so that her feelings are acceptable.¹⁹

The narrator's attraction to Jal connects to Said's theories, as Said notes in *Orientalism* that the Orient is a sexual symbol that represents "sexual promise (and

¹⁹ Although she does mistake Jal for her brother initially, Emshwiller dispels any implications of incest— when she highlights her attraction for Jal, the connections to her brother generally fade away in favor of an assessment of Jal's masculine features. When she does think of her brother during her assessment, it is to differentiate the two, saying that Jal is stronger than her brother (264).

threat), untiring sensuality, [and] unlimited desire” (188). This analysis seems to prove itself in Emshwiller’s text because the narrator is attracted to the “other” rather quickly. Perhaps, however, the narrator is the sexual being, as she is the one who overreacts at his slightest (seemingly friendly) touch, who focuses (with pleasure) on his nakedness when removing his clothes to burn them, who fawns over him while he sleeps, and who readily expects him (as the “other,” of course) to break down her door at night to have his way with her. Emshwiller seems to leave this unclear, however, as it is ultimately because of Jal’s appearance that the narrator’s sexual appetites emerge; there is one single man (Leo) that the readers know of in the town, and the unnamed narrator seems to be merely on friendly terms with him. She is not attracted to Leo, but rather is attracted to the enemy soldier who is the “other.” She seems to be attracted to the exotic, much like Said argues when he says that the “other” is depicted as a sexually tempting entity (*Orientalism* 187-88).

More than one “Other”

The narrator lays claim to the enemy soldier in her head, making the excuse that it is because he is dangerous and that any woman who ends up with him would need to be careful. Said argues that, to the dominant culture, the “other” “is at bottom something either to be feared...or to be controlled” (301). She attempts to control Jal because of her attraction to him and because of her perceived superiority as the Westerner over the “other.” When it becomes clear that he will not be controlled by her (he falls for a Paiute woman who, as a Native American, is another form of “other”) she exerts the last form of control she has over him: her control over his secret, and ostensibly, his life. She exposes him and has him killed, and it is here that Emshwiller finally, truly reveals who the actual

“other” is; although she had hinted it before, it is this act of sheer barbarism that cements the American narrator’s status as the “other.”

Emshwiller’s character commits this act of betrayal not out of a sense of obligation to defend her village, but out of sexual jealousy. This is more severe, as she did not betray him, for example, to protect her town from a man capable of harming her and the townspeople, much as he had harmed the men in the mountains. Instead, Emshwiller chooses to send Jal to his death because of the narrator’s own, selfish interests. What is important in this act is not, then, her commitment to the common good of her town, but her capacity for murder and cannibalism that stems from her frustration at not being able to control and own Jal. Through this, Emshwiller makes it clear that the unnamed narrator is as much (or more of) the “other” than Jal, and that the narrator appears to be so because she is not able to be dominant over her “other.” She merely uses his “otherness” as a convenient way in which to get him killed, as, while it is never completely gone from her mind, she is able to put this “otherness” aside when it suits her.

The idea in “Killers” of the dominant culture being abhorrent is not wholly new or unpracticed, as Bhikhu Parekh asserts in the article “The West and Its Others.” Parekh notes that “powerful groups have always taken advantage of the weak and vulnerable, and found ways of justifying their actions to themselves and sometimes even to their victims. In this respect ‘civilised’ groups are no better than ‘barbarians’” (173). This occurs in “Killers,” as the Americans (who would generally be assumed to be the civilized group) are the characters who engage in the barbaric activity of cannibalism, which is considered the most savage and inhuman of acts. They consume their enemy because he is different, which can be interpreted as an allegory representing the effects of

Orientalism. The narrator ignores the facts around her and ascribes to the dogma that everyone else buys into, which offers a sort of justification for her life and her actions; it is how she is able to feel superior to the man that she has killed.

Emshwiller seems to argue in this story against the ignorant mindset that facilitates polarity between cultures, and perhaps exemplifies it best in the brief ideological and dogmatic debate that polarizes the two sides at their cores. When Jal reiterates his oath to fight until he dies, the narrator exclaims “I’ll bet you don’t even know which side is which anymore. If you ever did;” Jal retorts “you’re the ones heated up the planet. It wasn’t us. It was you and your greed” (263). This could be first construed as two opposing sides debating their standpoints, but really, because the Westerner is actually more of the negative character, it stands to reason that Jal’s point of view should be examined again. Perhaps this is a jibe at the debate on global warming, but the operative term here is “greed” and its implications. With greed comes a certain self-centeredness that, as it has been argued by Said, is rampant among dominant groups. Indeed, those in power seem to want the world for themselves, and they do not care who they trample to get it— they simply make justifications for their perceived right to take things over. With this said, it does not seem that the “other” is wholly innocent either. Both groups are wrong, as they both use accusatory generalizations (“it wasn’t us. It was you”) and are killing each other out of ignorance (263).

The mentality of “Killers” is that of “us versus them,” and is very significant. Emshwiller appears to suggest that the West and its “other” are not as different as her characters would believe, and that this mentality that celebrates polarization is what is ruining everything. Indeed, the United States of the story is primarily destroyed because

of all of the fighting, and there is so much isolation and continued animosity that it seems as if America will never rebuild itself. Furthermore, although America is destroyed, Emshwiller does not display pity for nor empathize with the fallen nation like Brin does in his scenario. Indeed, it seems to be the United States, in “Killers,” that has brought the enemy to its door through its continually polarized attitude toward the world, and that is to blame. Perhaps, in this scenario, if the United States had not always chosen an “us versus them” mentality, the world would not have acted in such a way towards it in the end.

Because of her complication of who the “other” actually is in the story, Emshwiller suggests that Americans are, if not solely the “other,” at least just as complicit in the barbarous activities that they blame on others. Emshwiller appears to argue that mentalities like the one in her story are pervasive even today, and that these mentalities will bring nothing but destruction. As “Killers” is a response to the Iraq war, it is necessary to note a major, pervasive argument regarding the reason the United States is in the Middle East: many people argue that the war is about foreign oil and is merely being fought under the guise of a more noble fight against terrorism. In other words, it has been argued that the United States is in the Middle East in a bid to control the region and the riches that it has to offer, while putting forth the reasoning that it is actually there in an effort to civilize the region and rid it of the extremist faction that attacked the United States on 9/11.

It is perhaps no coincidence, then, that Emshwiller has the unnamed narrator become the catalyst for Jal’s demise once the narrator realizes that she has no control over him. It shows the ugliness of what happens when this type of mindset is fostered and shows that

a group that ascribes such ignorant and inaccurate attributes to another group without full understanding is not so different from the barbarity that it imagines onto its target.

Emshwiller's protagonist acts like the stereotypical "other" at the end by engaging in barbarous acts. In a bid for control, she destroys Jal, much like some would suggest is happening currently in the Middle East.

Said notes in his 2003 preface to *Orientalism* that "these supreme fictions lend themselves easily to manipulation and the organization of collective passion has never been more evident than in our time, when the mobilizations of fear, hatred, disgust, and resurgent self-pride and arrogance... are very large-scale enterprises" (xvii). Said expresses the hope that people would work to understand Middle Easterners, but, unfortunately for Said, Emshwiller's story suggests that this understanding has not occurred yet. Said argues that "there has been so massive and calculatedly aggressive an attack" on the Middle East that democracy and modernity have been all but forgotten (xix). Emshwiller seems to argue similarly, as she turns her narrator into the evil entity—in this case, a woman who is reminded of (or half-remembers) human decency and equality, but who throws it away for petty reasons.

Since the attacks on 9/11, many Americans perceive that the United States and its people are being threatened, and that anti-American extremists are trying to destroy the American way of life. This is a sentiment not unlike what is felt in Brin's *The Postman*. However, while *The Postman* extols the virtues of the patriotic fervor and insists on America's greatness and rightful place at the apex of the world, "Killers" counters this glorification by saying that that mindset is causing many of the problems being faced today. Emshwiller's story rallies against the idea of the United States feeling justified in

maltreating the “other,” by turning the Americans into the “other.” In Brin, barbarian hordes are invading, and Americans must stop them. In Emshwiller, this trope is inverted, suggesting that although there again are hordes coming to attack the United States, it is the American people who must be stopped because they keep perpetuating the same culturally ignorant ideologies over and over again. Indeed, Said argues that this polarization is leading to “nationalist passions and therefore nationalist murderousness,” and Emshwiller appears to be asking when (if ever) it will end (“The Clash of Definitions” 72).

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Patricia Kerslake argues that our examination of the “other” reflects our vision of ourselves (10). Both Brin and Emshwiller examine the United States through the construction of its “other” but achieve very disparate results. While in Brin’s text the enemy is clearly defined and is always discernible from other characters, Emshwiller’s “others” are not so clear. Brin is using his construction of the “other” in order to establish the grotesque and undesirable nature of anti-American sentiments. Through his treatment of the trope of the “other,” Brin also establishes his idea that pro-American sentiments are desirable and will work to rescue or restore the United States no matter what danger it is in. Emshwiller, on the other hand, does appear to use the tactic of the construction of the “other” in order to suggest that the United States is the problem, as it is revealed late in the story that the narrator actually falls more closely under the traditional characterization of the “other” than the antagonist. Through this, Emshwiller seems to suggest that it is the habit of creating the “other” that has turned the United States into a more accurate representation of the trope. Both authors fight a war of ideologies, working to figure out America’s place in the world and whether or not it is as morally righteous as it often presumes to be.

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