

THINGS AND BEINGS:
A LITERARY CRITICISM OF OBJECTS

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Introduction

In the corner of my family's home office, in a quart sized Ziploc bag, a hoard of white and red pens filled the plastic vessel. These pens were an advertising tool provided for a pharmaceutical company. When a change in policies came about, the pens were set aside, no longer a valid item for distribution. As a result, my dad left the pens here, untouched. It could have been their color or their sheer availability that sparked my use of them, but this initial reasoning does not strike me as much as the prolonged use that followed. I utilized the pens from childhood through high school. When it came time to leave for college, my dad willfully let me take the rest of them.

Now, so many years later, the last of the stash begins to run dry. Pens must not have been meant to last more than a decade. They completed their job, one after another. They have been scattered, discarded over both a large span of time and geography. Every *stylo* is wrapped with a soft grip, so each gives an individual press against my right index finger. They leave a trace upon most of my work, agendas, assignments, and journals. These simple utensils possess a history; they are totems that have endowed me with communication as well as comfort.

Having acknowledged this particular objects' continual impact upon my life, I plan to reveal the Vibrant Materiality, or universal energy, experienced by and between all things human and nonhuman throughout this thesis. By observing different authors' interactions with objects across a wide span of time and space, a vast survey of the impact of objects will present itself.

Literature Review

This analysis surveys the various roles objects play in literature and argues for their underlying thing-power, the ability to interact with human entities. Jane Bennett, author of *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, was the first to coin this term, applying thing-power to literature, politics, philosophy, and engineering. Her text is in conversation with Graham Harman's dissertation *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*. Unlike Bennett's text, Harman's analyses of objects were focused in philosophy. Overtime, a distinction was made between Object-Oriented Philosophy (OOP) and Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO) which allowed OOO a greater expanse for application. This analysis will be written in the form of a literary criticism, exploring the subfield of ecocriticism—the practice of coupling literature with ecology. For the purpose of specificity, this thesis will focus on a subcategory within that field known as object studies. By applying this method of speculative relativism to literature, readers gain access to humankind's detailed history and relationship with materialism.

In Timothy Morton's article "Here Comes Everything: The Promise of Object-Oriented Ontology," the need for speculative relativism is emphasized:

The ecological crisis stimulated two flavors of reaction: regular (normative ecophilosophy) and cool (the effervescent philosophical movement known speculative realism). The regular flavor conjures up the good old days when things meant what they said and said what they meant... The cool flavor fizzes with future--the bliss of new thinking, more at home with the shock of ecological reality. (1)

This thesis covers a variety of authors, each showcasing a different relationship with objects. By examining monumental texts, I will highlight how the histories and social constructions that frame each work showcase various types of human and nonhuman relationships. In this way, fiction and poetry will not only represent the ideas

of its authors, but the authors' geographical location and place in time. Working toward the present, this thesis will conclude with my own poetry created and analyzed with a subconscious thing-power at play.

The preliminary research for this thesis began in Summer 2015. At the same time, Andrew Cole, a professor of English at Princeton University, published his article "Those Obscure Objects of Desire." Through his analysis, Cole explains the recent lean toward ecocritical theory, regarding Object-Oriented Ontology as a subfield that inevitably fetishizes objects.

There are object relations, yes, but we can't really know or describe them in detail, only allude to them in our inevitably human way. Or you could press on, chalking up these considerable difficulties in naming to the problem of language and solving them by taking a page from Heidegger, who uses neologisms to refresh the addled language of philosophy—though who really wants to hear more jargon? (382)

This hesitance effectively halts the terms of OOO, but it does not necessarily include the potentially positive effects ecocritical theories promote. For this reason, I do pursue OOO and its vast capabilities. Each theory possesses its own pitfalls that should be acknowledged to strengthen their further application.

Humans have become routinely desensitized to the power of nonhuman entities. Some of this resistance to the nonhuman can be sourced from monotheistic religions. When one accepts the existence of a single god, they accept a secondary position in the universe; they join a hierarchy in which they operate under an omnipotent power or an omniscient being. In the case of Catholicism, humans maintain a soul, a source of power, and are therefore more powerful than that which does not have a soul—nonhuman entities. Flora and fauna are not allowed free will and are thereby incapable of defending or maintaining a soul for themselves. This ideology constricts the Vital Materialist and is

incongruent with an eco-centric mindset. When humans and nonhumans are kept separate, their relationship is severed, but that implied disunity is not evidenced by the observable exchange between objects and humans. So, for the purpose of mobility, experimentation and exploration, it will be essential to analyze the actions of both the human and nonhuman on a level plane. Objects will be understood as actants in an ever changing ecosystem that is irrevocably interconnected. By contrast, Polytheistic religions allow for greater connectivity between things human and nonhuman. For this reason, Hinduism serves as a source of exploration in later chapters¹.

The concept of edible matter is explored at length throughout this thesis. Bennett found this term by “[d]rawing on studies of obesity, recent food writing, and on ideas formulated by Thoreau and Nietzsche on the question of diet,” with which she then “...present[ed] the case for edible matter as an actant operating inside and alongside humankind, exerting influence on moods, dispositions, and decisions” (xvii). During the initial conception of this thesis, I strived to marry two of my passions: ethical veganism and literary analysis. Although this thesis now covers the larger parameters of thing-power, edible matter is present at its forefront. Furthermore, the presence of edible matter haunts most of my creative work presented in Chapter 4.

The application of object studies as a form of literary criticism is still relatively new. Being so, I must take a final moment to credit Bennett. She brings her own work to a close with this personal maxim, and I would like to begin my thesis modeled after this understanding of Vibrant Materiality:

I believe in one matter-energy, the maker of things seen and unseen. I believe that this pluriverse is traversed by heterogeneities that are

¹ See Chapter 4.

continually doing things. I believe it is wrong to deny vitality to nonhuman bodies, forces, and forms, and that a careful course of anthropomorphization can help reveal that vitality, even though it resists full translation and exceeds my comprehensive grasp. I believe that encounters with matter can chasten my fantasies of human mastery, highlight the common materiality of all that is, expose a wider distribution of agency, and reshape the self and its interests. (Bennett 122)

Ecocritical theory seeks to reveal our perceptions of waste and objects, consequently personifying environmental issues. By endowing objects with thing-power, their value increases. This mindset promotes sustainability and preservation. Reinforcing the intrinsic importance of objects across literature often times reveals the extortion of our environment. As a result, the countless pangs of ecological degradation finally resound.

Chapter 1 – William Shakespeare and Natural Elements

Born in 1564, William Shakespeare's work has been performed and studied for centuries. More than simply a literary touchstone, Shakespeare's plays represent the 16th century's historical relationship with objects. Themes of mental health, betrayal, and suicide pervade his verse. Through a formal observation, human entities perpetuate these themes independently; a formal criticism might touch on the symbolic qualities of the placement or use of an object, but denies totems the independence ecocritical theory reveals. Object-Oriented Ontology seeks to reveal the influence nonhuman entities have upon their human counterparts, exposing their underlying thing-power. So, when Object-Oriented Ontology raises these objects onto a level plane of comparison with humans, objects shed their ineffectual guise and reclaim their hidden potential. If readers acknowledge this potential, it will revitalize their perspective of everyday objects, enhancing the value of nonhuman entities. In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, thing-power is repeatedly displayed by water, flowers, clothing, and soil, playing a vital role in players' mortality and facilitating their eventual immortality.

Ophelia, Hamlet's love interest, maintains one of the most tangible relationships with objects. In Act IV, Ophelia commences a gift-giving ceremony. Upon reaching a state of extreme mourning, due to her father's sudden death and her severed relationship with Hamlet, Ophelia is driven to collect flora. She distributes particular species of flowers to her brother, Laertes; Hamlet's uncle, King Claudius; and Hamlet's mother, Queen Gertrude. Furthermore, the species of flowers represent abstract, emotional concepts. Ophelia begins, "There's rosemary, that's for remembrance; pray you, love, remember" (4.5.179-180). As she passes out these tokens, she signifies their purpose:

“remembrance.” In this case, rosemary is a token with the poignant power to transfer love and remembrance upon these individuals. The ability to gift the intangible is truly optimistic, but Ophelia’s ability to communicate her depression or growing instability has deteriorated; nonhuman entities step in as messengers, mending the communication gap. Unfortunately, the circumstances do not foster a positive transference of emotions for long. She continues, “There’s fennel for you, and columbines. There’s rue for you, and here’s some for me; we may call it herb of grace o’ Sundays. You must wear yours with a difference. There’s a daisy” (4.5.184-187). By presenting rue, a namesake synonymous with lamentation, it is apparent that Ophelia is attempting to lament her losses, but this can only be made clear by the distribution of literal rue. The darker motive underlying this gift-giving ceremony is signified with the absence of violets: “I would give you some violets, but they withered all when my father died” (4.5.188-189). Here, Ophelia has explicitly revealed that the gift-giving ceremony is a mode of grieving, but the inability to adequately grieve is made apparent by the lack of the proper flower. Like Ophelia’s father, violets cannot be found in the living realm. She does not have the means to accept the loss of love from both her father and Hamlet. This scene is often cited to support Ophelia’s insanity; her riddles are dismissed as ravings and her actions are considered childlike. When objects are reevaluated as communicative tokens, this scene can be understood as a final plea for recognition. These flowers collectively convey Ophelia’s inability to lament and her devout wish for this to be acknowledged.

Ophelia’s suicide swiftly follows the gift-giving ceremony, only separated by the theatrical timeframe of a single scene. Gertrude gives a speech that is chiefly descriptive with an attention to the surrounding objects that influence Ophelia; flora, water, and

clothing each play a part in her demise, thereby revealing the different grades and motives objects possess. The cause of Ophelia's death is difficult to ascertain from Gertrude's announcement alone, and thus it is open to interpretation: a suicide, a mistake brought on by a compromised state of mind, or a result of malevolent thing-power. As explored in the gift-giving scene, Ophelia had fallen into a state of mourning, which she communicated only through riddles. If the gift-giving scene can be interpreted as a plea for acknowledgement, if the flora were perceived as objects intentionally bestowed onto Ophelia's loved ones to ensure her own remembrance after death, then Ophelia's death could easily be interpreted as a suicide. This elucidation would still bestow thing-power upon the flowers which facilitated Ophelia's importance on earth despite her fast-approaching absence. So, the importance of flora is emphasized as the flower imagery continues throughout this scene: "Therewith fantastic garlands did she make / Of crowflowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples" (4.7.169). Gertrude's language proceeds as though the flowers fueled the situation. Ophelia had become entranced by the crowflowers, giving her life in exchange for them. Finally, this flora obsession could be seen as the leading force behind Ophelia's death as "on the pendent boughs her crownet weeds / Clamb'ring to hang, an envious silver broke, / When down her weedy trophies and herself, / Fell in the weeping brook" (4.7.172-75). From this viewpoint, the "crownet weeds" themselves struggle to hang along the waterfront. Still hypnotized by their thing-power, Ophelia falls victim to the brook alongside them. The water and flowers demonstrate a simultaneous influence upon her. This is the last instance of flora imagery in this speech as Gertrude shifts focus onto another object.

If Ophelia's death was not triggered by flora, a different thing-power is still at work; as Gertrude draws her announcement to a close, she addresses the nature of Ophelia's clothing at the time of her death. She explains, "Her clothes spread wide, / And mermaid like awhile they bore her up" (4.7.76-77). Momentarily, the clothes are somewhat mystical, affording Ophelia a mermaid-like demeanor. Inevitably, the garments become "heavy with their drink, / Pull[ing] the poor wretch from her melodious lay / To muddy death" (4.7.82-84). Since Ophelia's clothing pulled her to her muddy death, this announcement ends with an affirmation of thing-power's ability to induce death upon human entities. As Ophelia dies, she is immersed in mud; her body begins to decompose into a nonhuman entity.

It is valuable to note Laertes' reaction to the news of Ophelia's death; water is not yet perceived as a malignant force behind Ophelia's death. Instead, Laertes experiences its positive thing-power. He states, "Too much water hast thou, poor Ophelia, / And therefore I forbid my tears" (4.7.186-187). For Laertes, water stimulates the grieving process, the precise process Ophelia was incapable of completing. Unlike Ophelia's desire for lamentation, Laertes initially forbids himself from mourning. Following this, Laertes does weep, referring to the act as "our trick; nature her custom holds, / Let shame say what it will" (4.7.188-189). By giving into weeping, water has effectively been transferred to Laertes, who facilitates the spring of water from within himself. The thing-power of water was exchanged between siblings, playing a part in the death of one, while facilitating the grieving process for the other.

Ophelia's death is continually discussed amongst the play's characters as the plot moves forward from Act IV into Act V. Two gravediggers, referred to as First Clown and

Second Clown, are the chief players in this scene. These characters act as crucial comic relief at the play's turning point; Hamlet learns of Ophelia's death by the end of the scene. First Clown and Second Clown discuss the nature of Ophelia's death, but in riddles which would placate an audience. Digging into the deeper meaning of their philosophical dialogue, there is an evident thing-power bestowed upon water, suggesting that this element held a higher agency behind Ophelia's death as opposed to flora or clothing. First Clown begins by inquiring about Ophelia's burial: "Is she to be buried in Christian burial, when she willfully seeks her own salvation?" (5.1.1-2). This question is fairly straightforward, but opens up the ongoing debate about the method of Ophelia's death; *if* Ophelia's death was a product of a compromised, suicidal mental state rather than a resultant of external thing-power, she would not receive salvation. Second Clown's rebuttal would support the latter: "I tell thee she is; therefore make her grave straight. The owner hath sat on her, and finds it Christian burial" (5.1.3-5). First Clown questions, "How can that be, unless she drowned herself in her own defense?" (5.1.6-7). The Object-Oriented perspective would find a simple answer for this: although Ophelia defended herself by first floating in the brook, her clothes were willed to "pull" her into the depths. First Clown would not support this theory initially: "It must be *se offendendo*², it can not be else. For here lies the point: if I drown myself wittingly, it argues an act, and an act hath three branches—it is to act, to do, and to perform. Areal,

² In Daniel Kornstein's book *Kill All the Lawyers?: Shakespeare's Legal Appeal*, Kornstein dissects First Clown's use of this legal jargon: "The legal doctrine known as *se defendendo* was in use for four hundred years leading up to Shakespeare's time whenever a fight occurred and one party retreated as far as he could go before resorting to force. If, with his back literally against the wall, he then killed the aggressor, *se defendo* spared the defendant from the death penalty. Killing *se defendo* was called excusable homicide. But, the defendant, though saved from execution, still had to forfeit his property as expiation for his having taken human life" (104-105).

she drowned herself willingly” (5.1.9-12). Via satirical lawyer-logic, First Clown eventually comes to support the thing-power of water. His train of thought moves into an Object-Oriented perspective: “Here lies the water; good. Here stands the man; good. If the man go to this water and drown himself, it is, will he, nill he, he goes, mark you that. But if the water comes to him and drown him, he drowns not himself” (5.1.15-19). Here, First Clown has recognized water as a nonhuman entity capable of inflicting thing-power upon its human counterpart. First Clown originally did not mean to divest agency upon water, but effectively did so. From this point, one can surmise that Ophelia’s death was not of a suicidal nature, but one that was ultimately caused by water’s will to drown.

Finally, Hamlet himself must cope with the process of grief and death and is triggered to do so by examining an object: the skull of his deceased jester. Hamlet’s discovery of the skull forces him to reexamine his own mortality, harkening back to his original query, “to be or not to be” (3.1.57). By examining the skull of Yorick, Hamlet is moved to question the processes of death and decay. Similar to the Grave Diggers’ dialogue, Hamlet spins his own web of philosophical logic:

As thus: Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexander returneth to dust, the dust is earth, of earth we make loam, and why of that loam whereto he was converted might they not stop a beer barrel? Imperious Caesar, dead and turned to clay, might stop a hole to keep the wind away. Oh, that that earth which kept the world in awe should patch a wall t’expel the winter’s flaw! (5.1.208-216)

This method of reasoning parallels the syntactical structure in which First Clown’s dialogue was executed; it effectively directs Hamlet to a well thought out conclusion through rhetorical questions and an examination of environmental elements. For Hamlet, an evaluation of soil and the equality of decomposition provides him peace from his “to be or not to be” query. By exploring the process by which the human body decomposes,

Hamlet bestows thing-power upon soil. First, he breaks down the process of decomposition: “Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexander returneth to dust, the dust is earth, of earth we make loam...” Even a renowned hero is transformed by thing-power as the human entity mimics its soil setting and converts into its nonhuman form. Similarly, Hamlet dwells on Caesar’s death: “Imperious Caesar, dead and turned to clay, might stop a hole to keep the wind away. Oh, that that earth which kept the world in awe should patch a wall t’expel the winter’s flaw!” Clay’s ability “t’expel” winter showcases soil’s resistance; the newly transformed Caesar fights against the season’s harsh conditions, even in his nonhuman form. Utilizing well-known political figures, like Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar, Hamlet seeks to speak of the equality of all humankind, despite previous labels like socioeconomic status, that are maintained among the living. Hamlet expresses the eventual equality of all humans based on mortality and thereby supports the transference of thing-power between human beings and the earth. Similar to Ophelia’s interaction with the brook, both the environmental elements of soil and water are intrinsically involved in the balance of life and death. They act as agents of equality, perpetuating the cycle of mortality, ultimately transferring their thing-power to humankind and metamorphosing humans into nonhuman entities.

Throughout *Hamlet*, there is an evident struggle between the thing-power of flowers, water, clothing, and soil. In Ophelia’s case, the cause of her death is skewed depending on which object possessed the higher thing-power at the time of her demise. Furthermore, Ophelia’s motivation is limited without an examination of the flowers she presented before her death. In Hamlet’s case, soil is directly linked to his struggle with his impending mortality, effectively revealing objects’ ability to maintain the human soul

through nonhuman metamorphosis. Natural elements, like water and earth, have the power to enable humans with communication and immortality. As Laertes learns of his sister's death, he experiences an immediate reaction by producing water, completing the lamentation process Ophelia was denied; while Julius Caesar's body decays, the power of his nonhuman form withstands the force of the harshest season: winter.

When Object-Oriented Ontology is applied to *Hamlet*, objects become integral players alongside their human counterparts. If human and nonhuman entities are allowed this even playing field, the story and its characters are reevaluated differently. Scratching at the surface of *Hamlet* with a formal perspective will only provide a narrow understanding of the text. By reading with the Object-Oriented lens, traditional interpretations are uprooted to reveal their untapped, interwoven potential restlessly waiting beneath.

Chapter 2 – Charles Baudelaire and Mind-Altering Substances

First published in 1857, Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs Du Mal* or *The Flowers of Evil* is an internationally recognizable collection of poetry that still faces praise and scrutiny. Some critics will argue the importance of utilizing a formal lens when analyzing Baudelaire's rhetoric or subject matter. Since Baudelaire's work spawned other popular poets, such as Paul Verlaine, Arthur Rimbaud, and Stéphane Mallarmé, it is easy to view his work in the literary tradition. If a reader presses forward and questions this perception, they will find a thing-power ordinarily overlooked. Baudelaire addresses particular objects with urgency, acknowledging their effects on human entities. Through the course of his collection, objects with great thing-power often play a role of violence, spurring mental alteration. His fascination with alcohol and substance abuse begs an invaluable question: do certain object possess an inherently malevolent thing-power?

Of course, Baudelaire's work faces the issue of translation. In an effort to maintain continuity, this chapter will utilize William Aggeler's translation of *The Flowers of Evil*, published in 1954. Likewise, the titles of these poems will appear in Aggeler's English translation.

Baudelaire's poem "The Vampire" alters the classic tale of the immortal, dark spectre by offering a fresh narrative from the perspective of a sword and poison. These objects are not addressed in the form of a metaphor. Instead, a direct dialogue is exchanged between the sword, the poison, and the poem's protagonist. In this poem, the vampire's victim is the primary communicator. The poem opens with the narrator damning the vampire: "You who, like the stab of a knife, / Entered my plaintive heart," and immediately curses her, "— Infamous bitch to whom I'm bound / Like the convict to

his chain, / Like the stubborn gambler to the game, / Like the drunkard to his wine, / Like the maggots to the corpse, / — Accurst, accurst be you!” (Baudelaire 1-2, 7-12). The reader enters a desperate scene in which the protagonist desires aid in escaping a restricted state. This is when the protagonist turns to objects for help. Their reply is essential when it comes to examining the malevolent thing-power at play throughout Baudelaire’s poems. Baudelaire’s protagonist introduces these objects: I begged the swift poniard / To gain for me my liberty, / I asked perfidious poison / To give aid to my cowardice” (13-16). Their verdict is complex: “Alas! both poison and the knife / Contemptuously said to me: / “You do not deserve to be freed / From your accursed slavery, / Fool! — if from her domination / Our efforts could deliver you, / Your kisses would resuscitate / The cadaver of your vampire!” (17-24). Poison and knife have made a decision that does not benefit this victim.

At first glance, these objects could be perceived as selfish or apathetic characters. Still, there is a sense of purpose in their reply, suggesting the opposite. The protagonist requests aid from these objects to escape eminent vampirism. The objects may refuse to lend their thing-power as it would only free an individual susceptible to seduction and imprisonment. Knowing this, the objects allow the protagonist’s death as it impedes the “resuscitat[ation]” of a new vampire. Both poison and knife are then perceived as objects capable of alleviating elongated misery or abuse. In this sense, they are considerably humane, affording the protagonist a respectable death.

In his poem “Poison,” Baudelaire revisits the idea of substance abuse in relation to objects. In the context of this poem, wine impairs its consumer. This edible matter has a thing-power capable of altering perception: “Wine knows how to / adorn the most

sordid hovel / With marvelous luxury / And make more than one / fabulous portal appear
/ In the gold of its red mist / Like a sun setting in a cloudy sky” (Baudelaire 1-5). This transformation from “sordid hovel” to “fabulous portal” is likely a positive interpretation of the effects of alcohol; Baudelaire depicts wine as a beneficial substance. He then extends this narrative to include opium: “Opium magnifies that which is limitless, / Lengthens the unlimited, / Makes time deeper, hollows out voluptuousness, / And with dark, gloomy pleasures / Fills the soul beyond its capacity” (Baudelaire 6-10). Opium receives a similar treatment; the substance is likened to infinity, producing “pleasure,” even if it is of the “gloomy” variety. Finally, Baudelaire acknowledges some outside source, some unnamed character of the utmost importance. This is compared alongside the aforementioned substances, “All that is not equal to the poison which flows / From your eyes, from your green eyes, / Lakes where my soul trembles and sees its evil side...” (Baudelaire 11-13). Only when this character enters the scene do poisonous objects, wine and opium, become “evil.” After this character is introduced, objects are incapable of equivocally affecting the narrator in a positive manner: “All that is not equal to the awful wonder / Of your biting saliva, / Charged with madness, that plunges my remorseless soul / Into oblivion / And rolls it in a swoon to the shores of death” (Baudelaire 16-20). The character comes to a conclusion which opposes the original sentiment, suggesting these objects are incapable of forming equally satisfying relationships with humans. In this case, the character will “swoon” without the “biting saliva” of this mysterious counterpart. Given this reaction to their “green eyes,” it is difficult to ascertain if the speaker cares for things human or nonhuman more, but the sheer power objects of a

poisonous nature originally possess is notably positive. This relationship is further explored in subsequent Baudelaire poems within this chapter.

Baudelaire continues to write on substances, but significantly decreases his sense of perplexity. In his poem “The Pipe,” Baudelaire praises the use of tobacco in congruence with the writing process. The Pipe introduces itself: “I am an author’s pipe. It’s clear, / To see my face--like some Kaffir / Or Ethiope, dark-hued--that he / Spends many an hour smoking me” (Baudelaire 1-4). Unlike “The Vampire,” “The Pipe” allows an author’s pipe the upmost agency. Not only is this object allowed speech, but narration as well. Given Baudelaire’s authorship, this poem could be tied to his own experiences with substance. The pipe addresses the author stating, “When he sits bowed with grief and woe, / I smoke like country bungalow, / Where, in the kitchen, steaming hot, / Awaits the ploughman’s supper-pot” (Baudelaire 5-8). The author is in a state of “grief and woe,” so the pipe plays a crucial role in numbing these aches. In the final two stanzas, the pipe becomes an object that seeks to charm and cheer its smoker: “I lull his soul in my embrace / Of blue-gray wisps, rising in space. / One of my fiery mouth; and wind / Him round in balm-like blandishment, / Charming his weary heart, content / To soothe his spirit, calm his mind” (Baudelaire 9-14). It is clear that the pipe can “lull,” “soothe,” and “calm” the author. Baudelaire’s choice to praise this object would suggest that substances have a positive thing-power in relation to their users, although his poem “Poison” questions the total appeal of substance use in its entirety.

Baudelaire’s relationship with alcohol is one that receives a good deal of attention in his poetry. “Wine” is a section of *Les Fleurs du Mal* consisting of five poems focused on the consumption of alcohol. In the poem “The Soul of Wine,” wine receives a voice

similar to that of the pipe. The wine begins to communicate from behind its flask: “One night, the soul of wine was singing in the flask: / ‘O man, dear disinherited! to you I sing / This song full of light and of brotherhood / From my prison of glass with its scarlet wax seals’” (Baudelaire 1-4). The wine is motivated to communicate to its consumer, labeling its current state a prison. A reader might find the “prison of glass” a position in which the consumer is entrapping edible matter, but the wine narrates an alternative perspective. First, the wine sympathizes with the protagonist: “I know the cost in pain, in sweat, / And in burning sunlight on the blazing hillside, / Of creating my life, of giving me a soul” (Baudelaire 5-7). The wine continues praising its creator, “I shall not be ungrateful or malevolent, / For I feel a boundless joy when I flow / Down the throat of a man worn out by his labor; / His warm breast is a pleasant tomb / Where I’m much happier than in my cold cellar” (Baudelaire 8-12). The wine has taken a status of admiration, obsessing over the man who will consume it. It would seem that wine’s request is to be consumed for good reason, to contribute its matter and energy to man’s production. A rather Marxist wish, wine demands to be a cog in the human machine as exemplified by hypothetical participation in human acts: “Do you hear the choruses resounding on Sunday / And the hopes that warble in my fluttering breast? / With sleeves rolled up, elbows on the table, / You will glorify me and be content” (Baudelaire 13-16). As the poem comes to a climactic close, wine’s wish is reinforced: a desire to be a part of something powerful, namely artistic. It states,

“I shall light up the eyes of your enraptured wife, / And give back to your son his strength and his color; / I shall be for that frail athlete of life / The oil that hardens a wrestler’s muscles. / Vegetal ambrosia, precious grain scattered / By the eternal Sower, I shall descend in you / So that from our love there will be born poetry, / Which will spring up toward God like a rare flower!” (Baudelaire 17-24)

Wine has accepted its position: a single variable in the lengthy cycle of a life often rife with turmoil, wine acts as an emissary imparting hope and vitality.

Despite this account of wine's positive thing-power, Baudelaire's series of wine poetry is not entirely supportive of that power. Much of his stance seems dependent upon its user. In Baudelaire's poem "The Murderer's Wine," wine plays the vice of a murderous criminal, twisting wine's thing-power in a malevolent direction. In this poem, a man recalls the love he once had for his wife and explains the transformation of this love overtime which has become "too much" (Baudelaire 27). The narration begins with an exclamation: "My wife is dead and I am free! / Now I can drink my fill" (Baudelaire 1-2). A reader is presented the protagonist's simple cause-and-effect mindset; without his wife, the husband finds peace. Now, the challenge is understanding their relationship, the disintegration of their marriage, and the presence of wine between these two individuals. In the lines that follow, readers are presented with a clearly positive image as the husband states, "When I'd come home without a soul, / Her screaming would drive me crazy / I am as happy as a king / The air is pure, the sky superb... / We had a summer like this / When I fell in love with her!" (Baudelaire 3-8). The husband seems to believe his inability to provide his wife monetary stability is just cause for murdering her: "To satisfy the awful thirst / That tortures me, I'd have to drink / All the wine it would take to fill / Her grave — that is not a little: / I threw her down a well, / And what is more, I dropped on her / All the stones of the well's rim" (Baudelaire 9-15). It is at this point that wine's role is clear; a murderer's vice, wine acts as a coping mechanism through which its user may repress his guilt. This is further emphasized by the poem's later lines, "I'll get blind drunk tonight; / Then without fear, without remorse, / I'll lie down on the ground / And

I'll sleep like a dog!" (Baudelaire 42-45). So, if wine eases man's pains, does it also hold with it a greater responsibility for the crimes committed given its guarantee of eventual, numb-induced peace?

In the context of Baudelaire's poetry, one might conclude that edible matter's thing-power depends on the consumer. For a poet, wine's thing-power increases communication; a poet sits down to his table, consumes, creates, and communicates. For the misfortunate, wine's matter veils pain. In this case, wine has still maintained its integrity, merely shielding a human entity from reality. If anything, Baudelaire's series of substance-related poems appear cautionary. After all, the mention of a seemingly human entity with "green eyes" does overshadow the thing-power of poison and opium in "Poison." It is possible that "The Murderer's Wine" acts as the polar opposite narration of "The Soul of Wine" to emphasize humankind's manipulation and potential misuse of objects; if the soul of wine is inherently pure, it would take a truly inhumane act, like murder, to compromise its integrity.

Charles Baudelaire's collection *Les Fleurs du Mal* is well-known for its treatment of the human condition, but this collection possesses an underlying message regarding this condition in relation to objects. Substances like tobacco, opium, and wine have an evident thing-power that gifts their users an altered state of mind. It would seem that this power is positive or negative based on the situation and user. Objects are portrayed as charitable characters, lending themselves to humans' functionality or desires.

Chapter 3 – Pablo Neruda and Common Objects

Pablo Neruda's poetry solidified a legacy of heartache and love. Those who have indulged in his work find solace and solidarity throughout his poetry based either on his budding relationships or romantic misconnections. In Neruda's poem "Love," he claims, "because of you, the heady perfumes of summer pain me; because of you, I again seek out the signs that precipitate desires: shooting stars, falling objects." In this final line, Neruda associates "shooting stars" with "falling objects" as they both stimulate his desires. If a reader questions this conscious diction, this breached division between love and things, Neruda's celebration of common objects unfurls.

This chapter references a post-mortem collection of Neruda's work that consists of his object-centered poetry. *Odes to Common Things* was published in 1994, 21 years following Pablo Neruda's death. This bilingual edition includes the poem's original, Spanish form, alongside an English translation. The collection begins with "Ode to things," a poem that surveys Neruda's love for many objects. In this way, Neruda gives an expansive definition of objects.

The first stanza states, "I have a crazy, / crazy love of things" (1-2). This love is non-restrictive as it extends to "all things / not just / the grandest," and it is infinite as it encompasses "all things" (12-14). He continues, "Oh yes, / the planet / is sublime! / It's full of pipes / weaving / hand-held / through tobacco smoke, / and / keys / and salt shakers - / everything, / I mean, / that is made / by the hand of man, every little thing" (24-36). In the line that follows, objects are defined as any thing that is "made by the hand of man, *every* little thing." In the context of the poem, objects are momentarily understood as items which "mankind has / built" (48-49). So, what should a reader make

of the image of “the planet” mentioned previously? If objects are truly defined by their creator, are items derived from nature excluded from Neruda’s affections?

In the third stanza, Neruda emphasizes his love for “all / things,” and thereby extends his definition to that of the abstract: “not because they are / passionate / or sweet-smelling / but because, / this ocean is yours, / and mine” (60-70). Now, there is a definite allowance for naturalistic adoration. He then defines an object as an entity that bears “the trace / of someone’s fingers / on their handle or surface, / the trace of a distant hand / lost / in the depths of forgetfulness” (83-88). Objects are that which humanity has contacted, but having done so, these objects are imprinted while the “distant hand” is “lost.” Therefore, “the ocean” which is “yours, / and mine” serves as some sort of surrogate for memoriam; the trace remains, while the hand falls into “the depths of forgetfulness.”

Neruda’s connection with objects is not limited to visual imagery; the mention of a hand prefaces the fourth stanza which is based on tactile sensation. He “[pauses] in houses, / streets and / elevators / touching things, / identifying objects / that [he] secretly covet[s]” (89-94). His language extends to include sensations caused by humans: “that one because / it’s as soft / as the softness of a / woman’s hip, / that one there for its deep-sea color, / and that one for its velvet feel” (96-100). In this instance, a specifically female figure is equated with a deep-sea color and velvet. All three images effectively inform the reader of Neruda’s idealization of “soft” touch. It is also worth mentioning that these soft objects are coveted in secrecy; Neruda acknowledges his irregular act of praising everyday objects.

Finally, he addresses his audience: “no one can say / that I loved / only / fish, / or the plants / of the jungle and the field, / that I loved / only / those things that leap and

climb, desire, and survive” (104-111). Here, there is a direct reference to animals and their respective ecosystems; once again, Neruda’s definition encompasses the naturalistic: flora and fauna.

Neruda’s tactile relationship to objects resurges in the poem’s final lines: “Not only did they touch me, / or my hand touched them: / they were / so close / that they were a part / of my being, / they were so alive with me / that they lived half my life / and will die half my death” (115-123). The last impression this poem impresses upon the reader is one of total devotion and infusion; objects possess life and, by doing so, carry the responsibilities of a mortal being.

Having analyzed Neruda’s definition of objects at large, it is vital to examine the life that he imagines upon edible matter. In this instance, edible matter is further seen as the transfer of cells via consumption. In “Ode to the tomato,” Neruda illustrates the results of consuming nonhuman entities, utilizing imagery to depict culinary preparation as a sacrificial, bloody act. Even so, there is a sense of rebirth through which food can be eventually dignified.

He immediately casts a tone of inevitable demise as “daylight / splits / into a tomato's / equal halves: / its juice / flows / in the streets” (5-11). The audience understands the fate for a tomato is unavoidably sacrificial; edible matter serves a predominantly consumptive purpose. He then sets the scene in which the tomatoes will meet their demise: “In December, / the tomatoes / are on the move: / they raid / kitchens, / show up for lunch / or perch / with dignity / on shelves” (12-20). The tomatoes have entered the kitchen, or a vegetable's slaughterhouse equivalent, but rest “with dignity.” Neruda is slowly constructing an object worth respect; something “perch[ing]” on the

shelves, rather than slouching in defeat. Furthermore, these tomatoes “raid” the kitchens. They are given powerful movements that present them as arguably admirable fruits with agency.

He prefaces their death with a tone of finality—a few final words for food: “Tomatoes have / their own glow, / and a benign grandeur” (24-26). In this way, the reader must accept Neruda’s perspective of respect. He juxtaposes this sentiment with the tomato’s end. He announces, “All the same, / we’ll have / to put this one to death: / the knife / sinks into / its living pulp / it’s bloody / organ, / a poignant, / raw, / inexhaustible / sun” (27-37). Neruda does not utilize metaphor, but rather affirms tomatoes’ sentient existence; they are capable of death and a victim of humanity’s consumptive behavior. This is followed by the detailed image of the knife sinking into the flesh of the tomato, its “living pulp.” Backed by a list of adjectives, the organ is raw: exposed to the heat of sunlight, the original energy source that birthed the now slaughtered tomato. The circle of death and rebirth is thoroughly implied, instilling a sense of regret unto the reader.

Luckily, this is not where Neruda leaves the tomato. Even in death, the tomato serves a grander purpose. Many readers are met with a familiar setting: the dinner table. He explains, “And there it is: on / the table, the summer’s / equator, / a tomato-- / and earthen / sphere, / a fertile and / repeated / star- / reveals / its folds / and channels, / its renowned fullness, / its abundance / free of pits / and peels, / thorns and scales” (64-79). In this sense, the tomato has been cleansed. Previously filled with “pits and peels, thorns and scales,” the tomato is now openly exposed and “renowned” because of it. Neruda confirms this theoretical praise of the tomato’s sacrifice in the poem’s final words: “It’s the tomato’s / gift to us, / this fiery color / and undiminished freshness” (80-83). The

tomato has become a gift, and its alteration does not diminish its worth. Although the tomato has reached its end and met a bloody death, it has transformed for consumption and maintained its value still.

“Ode to the tomato” thoroughly examines Neruda’s relationship with edible matter. If food can be considered an object, and most of Neruda’s objects are humanized through his adoration, a reader might initially align consumption with murder. By contrast, when these tomatoes are sacrificed, Neruda does not depict consumption as an equivalent to death. They serve a new purpose: nourishment. This is considered an important part of their existence as evidenced by Neruda’s adjectives, “fullness” and “undiminished.” This also allows a glimpse at the immortality objects possess across literature. A tomato is merely one example of edible matter’s thing-power; transformed through consumption, objects nourish and thereby live through human entities. This parallels Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* as things nonhuman and human once again meld into a single being.

Pablo Neruda held a special fondness for flora. In his poem “Ode to a cluster of violets,” a bushel of flowers are described and personified in 57 lines and five stanzas. Since flowers are often utilized throughout classic literature, it will be useful to establish Neruda’s relationship to this species in particular, then to compare their similar role in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*.

Neruda introduces violets as a “crisp cluster / plunged in shadow” (1-2). It is valuable to note the immediate image of darkness, or “shadow” used to describe the cluster. The stanza continues as follows: “drops of violet / water / and raw sunlight / floated up with your scent. / A fresh / subterranean beauty / climbed up / from your buds /

thrilling my eyes and my life” (3-9). Although this flora is originally associated with “shadow,” the description turns in an affectionate manner. The violets are now a “subterranean beauty” and, by effect, “[thrill]” the poet’s “eyes” and “life.”

The second stanza serves as the poem’s narrative: “one at a time, flowers / that stretched forward / silvery stalks, / creeping closer to an obscure light / shoot by shoot in the shadows, / till they crowned / the mysterious mass / with an intense weight of perfume / and together / formed a single star / with a far-off scent and a purple center” (10-20). The flowers are capable of emerging from darkness, as they “stretched forward,” “creeping closer to an obscure light.” These flowers seek light, rather than shadows. By doing so, they gain an “intense weight” and form “a single star.” This is the stanza’s final objective: to induce an olfactory sensation.

The third stanza fabricates the image of a human in passing; this comparison creates an unsettling image that Neruda offsets with the beauty of the violets. He writes, “poignant cluster / intimate / scent / of nature, / you resemble / a wave, or a head of hair, / or the gaze / of a ruined water nymph / sunk in the depths” (21-29). This “water nymph” is ruined, “sunk in the depths” in the same fashion Shakespeare’s character, Ophelia, meets her death. This cluster of violets wilts, inching closer to its own decay. This image could suggest a grim relation between human entities and flowers, especially between these “mysterious” and “fragile” violets, suggesting their presence may signify malevolent thing-power.

Next, the reader is taken closer, to a more physically immediate proximity to the flora: “But up close, / in your fragrance’s / blue brazenness, / you exhale the earth, / an earthly flower, an earthen / smell and your ultraviolet / gleam / in volcanoes’ faraway

fires” (30-37). Here, the sense of smell resurfaces. The process of photosynthesis gains a new, poetic quality. This fragrance is considered “brazen.” Furthermore, the violets are now addressed in second person. Neruda speaks directly to the violets, unlike the tomatoes or objects reviewed previously. This change in speech pattern effectively humanizes the violets. This is followed with Neruda immediately inserting himself into another tactile relationship: “Into your loveliness I sink / a weathered face, / a face that dust has often abused” (38-40). The pollen, or “dust” is abusive; it has some sort of communicative property that offends what it contacts.

This poem’s final stanza sets the definitive view Neruda has of violets. He claims, “fragile cluster of starry / violets, / tiny, mysterious / planet / of marine phosphorescence, / nocturnal / bouquet nestled in green leaves: / the truth is / there is no blue word to express you. / Better than / any word / is the pulse of your scent” (48-57). The reader now understands that this object is indescribable as there is “no blue word to express” it. Furthermore, the final word, “scent,” reasserts the idea that the violets are best known for their olfactory relationship with humans.

After Neruda’s definition of objects is formulated through his foundational poetry, a reader is able to explore the nuanced perspectives Neruda has of various objects; he brings forth the thing-power of nonhuman entities, envisioning edible matter and flora as actants with their personal cycle of life and decay. He presents a complex, but generally affectionate relationship with objects, commonly conveyed through imagery based on tactile or olfactory sensations. Since his objects take on many roles, their value is often abstract or scattered, but there is an overall affinity that supports the thing-power and significance of nonhuman entities. Neruda’s work and mindset promotes

several core values of ecocriticism, including an appreciation of common objects that promotes preservation and conservation.

Chapter 4 – Self–Deconstruction

This thesis deconstructs the importance of objects throughout literature. By focusing on an individual author and the actions of objects in their work, it is possible to explore the vast spectrum of thing-power.

In this final chapter, I will analyze my own work with the same Object-Oriented Ontological lens. Unless otherwise stated, a large amount of this work was created following the literary discoveries and research compiled during the creation of this thesis. Therefore, some of the theory postulated was intentionally transferred into these poems. As I collected observations on these authors, I noticed my own work exemplified a similar practice which afforded deeper meaning in the placement and usage of objects in poetry. “The Exchange” explores the entanglement of grief with edible matter.

An Exchange

From within pockets of misfortune,
stowed away in trousers of ill will,
there are morsels of syrupy bliss.

Today, I made my first vegan waffle.
For nine years, I’d battled with
malfunctioning makers.

The grid finally
allowed me to knife off
a cornbread cake.

The loss of a colleague;
a dog-eared recipe.

The narrator has strived to create something over the length of “nine years,” but only gains success while experiencing loss. The first stanza reflects this sentiment stating, “From within pockets of misfortune, / stowed away in trousers of ill will, / there are morsels of syrupy bliss” (1-3). Although it is partially literal with its use of a syrup-oriented pun, this idea of a positive thing-power within a negative situation is first explained through metaphor and followed by an illustration.

The second stanza introduces an observable conflict: “Today, I made my first vegan waffle. / For nine years, I’d battled with / malfunctioning makers” (4-6). The audience now has a greater understanding of the struggle between the narrator and machinery, followed by the sudden compromise between them. This surprise, a victorious union between waffle maker and man, has occurred within a grim time frame. The third stanza affirms this positive cooperation explaining, “The grid finally / allowed me to knife off / a cornbread cake” (9-11).

Finally, the narrator completes the poem with the original sentiment via parallelism: “The loss of a colleague; / a dog-eared recipe” (12-13). With its use of brevity, this stanza simplifies the exchange of deprivation for reward; although the narrator faces turmoil, she is rewarded with the eventual bliss edible matter provides. This poem’s structure and concepts of trade are further explored in the piece “Moksha.”

Moksha

In my next world, we all practice Hinduism.

This week, I've released a baby cockroach and a dime spider from the apartment.
This afternoon, my brother kills an arachnid. Justifies, "A brown recluse."

Yesterday, I bought a rice ball from a food truck, and the cook wished me well on my way. My friend of a friend says,
"We'd only kill one cow to get the genetically modified meat-thing going."

Death means less death.
"Something is dead when it dies. That something is dead when it is killed."
Less death is death.

I want to tell them I've never believed in "god," but since I learned the Hindu mantra,
He is everywhere.

I arrive at the grocery store.
I walk through the parking lot.
I collect pancaked plastic bottles every few feet. There is no recycling bin.
The man slicing salmon compliments my socks.

As this poem later states in stanza five, "I've never believed in 'god,' but since I learned the Hindu mantra, He is everywhere." There is a clear force of change that was experienced during the poem's allotted time period. This change has reinvigorated values as the narrator releases "a baby cockroach and a dime spider from the apartment." Under the pretense of the "Hindu mantra," the narrator has accepted the belief that she is present in a cycle of karma. Following a definition of objects that includes fauna, these insects are included in this cycle. As karma unites humanity with these objects, there is an even larger sense of a level playing field in which objects are afforded thing-power. This is then contrasted by a fellow character's opposite inclination: "This afternoon, my brother kills an arachnid. Justifies, 'A brown recluse.'" When the brother is introduced in the poem, he simply disposes of such creatures. This cuts a deep line of parallelism that runs

throughout the rest of the poem. A positive idea is always met with a negative one; an object is either taken for granted or raised to a state of equality.

The second interaction the narrator experiences follows this same pattern: “Yesterday, I bought a rice ball from a food truck, and the cook wished me well on my way,” meaning a positive exchange was experienced between three forces, including the edible matter, “a rice ball.” So, a reader might expect the negative image knit within the same stanza: “My friend of a friend says, ‘We’d only kill one cow to get the genetically modified meat-thing going.’” If this poem has a focus on several Hindu ideals, it can be surmised that “a rice ball” is a piece of edible matter that possesses consumptive elements that are less harmful to the cycle of karma than the consumption of edible matter that is more clearly sentient, such as the “cow.” Furthermore, the cow is considered a sacred animal in Hindu culture. So, the placement of this image depicts a balance between non-violence and cruelty depending on the beholders dietary inventory.

The next stanza is simplified. Instead of images for comparison, an understanding of death is philosophically determined: “Death means less death. ‘Something is dead when it dies. That something is dead when it is killed.’ Less death is death.” The reader is given a sort of map to understand the methodology currently being explored by the narrator. This methodology hints at a belief system which does not see any greater benefit in “less death” as it is equated with death as a whole. When this is followed by “I want to tell them I’ve never believed in ‘god,’ but since I learned the Hindu mantra, He is everywhere,” it has been clarified that this narrator will adhere to the philosophical plan, determining that all life is equal and supporting the argument that all deaths are equal.

This mentality assures the value of the “arachnid” and “cow” as fauna objects with recognizable agency.

“Moksha” ends with a final interaction, reinvesting in the parallel format. The narrator states, “I arrive at the grocery store. I walk through the parking lot. I collect pancaked plastic bottles every few feet. There is no recycling bin. The man slicing salmon compliments my socks.” Here, the cause-and-effect structure results in a passing interaction between a butcher and the protagonist. The narrator tries to be a considerate citizen, collecting waste and recycling it. Even so, this procedure contrasts the very concept of Moksha; it insists that certain cycles must continue. As a result, the butcher’s presence undercuts the potentially positive act, echoing the uninhibited process of death. In the poem that follows, these themes of death and communication among human subjects are further presented.

Mariella

Six minutes past eight.
Tardy children sprint
through the courtyard
toward the classroom.
Before following,
I spy Mariella’s hair clip.
Unsure of the best method
for returning metal
to its hair-lined origins,
I withhold it.

She discloses,
“I’m sad today.”
Preceding the emotion:

“My mother was at the hospital this morning.”
Witnessing a friend’s delivery,
she’d readied her camera,

but photographed a
stillborn bundle.
“You could see the parents crying in the background.”
Mariella explains,
“I don’t know them.”

I’m sorting through a bag
of raisins and almonds.
“Would you like my cashews?”

“No.”

“Nobody likes cashews.”

“They’re my favorite.”

“Mariella” is a poem ripe with the presence of objects. More importantly, these objects are lost or exchanged as a relationship unfolds; objects facilitate the development of both characters’ association with one another. The poem begins with an initial object belonging to the poem’s namesake, Mariella: “I spy Mariella’s hair clip. / Unsure of the best method / for returning metal / to its hair-lined origins, / I withhold it” (6-10). In this moment, the hair clip is coveted, instigating a tone of value for things which do not belong to the self.

The audience learns about Mariella’s recent experience through a simple tête-à-tête dialogue in which her mother “Witness[ed] a friend’s delivery, / she’d readied her camera, / but photographed a / stillborn bundle” (16-19). Although Mariella does admit to being sad in the previous stanza, the last statement, “I don’t know them,” hints at some sort of distance or detachment in relation to the past event (22).

The poem draws to a close with an exchange of edible matter, or rather, the rejection of that attempt to gift nutrition. The narrator states that they are “sorting through a bag / of raisins and almonds” (23-24). This does not mention the “cashews” that are

offered in the line that follows: ““Would you like my cashews?”” (25). As the narrator offers Mariella some consolation, Mariella rejects any gifts, although “They’re [her] favorite” (28). This dialogue was created to model another exchange of edible matter in a moment of grief, but one that faces resistance. The presence of the bag of almonds, raisins, and cashews is irremovable; while Mariella is coping with images of premature death, nutrition is actively present. In this poem, edible matter’s power to nurture life is reinstated.

While exploring my own poetry under the Object-Oriented Ontological lens, I found thing-power not only enhanced my narrative, but provided a new mindset for recording humans' interactions with their world. By allowing objects their own power, we provide them a platform to speak with us. While writing with Vibrant Materiality theory in mind, eco-politics revealed objects’ undeniable influence on humankind.

Conclusion

Through the process of writing this thesis, I was approached with these recurring questions: why dedicate time to developing this theory, and what is valuable about its conception? I would like to respond with my own question: what would happen to our literature and our earth without this theory?

The clearest result is stagnation. Without interactive theories or new lenses through which readers can reevaluate literature, discussion and progression are both halted. This brings about the relationship between writers and their readers. Readers will always, if not subconsciously, apply their nuanced perspective, experiences, and emotions to the texts they read. Just as some children learn their first language through a gauze of motherese³, so are readings skewed by an individual's developed mindset. By intentionally applying a theory, this perspective is aimed. This is not to say that the ecocritical lens must be worn alone, but rather, by dividing ideas into categories and subcategories under the larger umbrella of literary criticism, universal concepts arise and comparative analyses are presented in a somewhat organized fashion.

In this thesis, ecocritical theory applies current issues of ecological degradation on a smaller, more personal level. Some might struggle to conceptualize the relationship between a forest and reams of warm paper, fresh from the printer; it would seem many have compartmentalized waste away from nature. Through the application of ecocritical theory, a focus on minute objects can begin to trickle over into readers' lives. Once the importance of a tomato is solidified, a bruised bushel might make it into a salad, rather

³ "The simplified and repetitive type of speech, with exaggerated intonation and rhythm, often used by adults when speaking to babies" (Collins English Dictionary).

than a trash bin. Objects are not only afforded dignity, but personality which warrants their careful use, preservation, and respect.

Part of this thesis was drafted with the same red and white pens originally introduced; I am dreading the day when their constant presence will finally recede. Through the production of this thesis, I have mined classic texts and reaped jeweled rewards. I ask others to engage with the possibilities of this theory and to apply its concepts to additional texts. Through this process, the collective understanding of Object-Oriented Ontology will prove its infinite expanse and continue to enlighten our understanding of ecocritical theory.

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