

Contextualizing “So Long: A Reflection on the Reality and Illusion of Change”

In the last hundred years, mechanization, industrialization, and modernization have raised the standard of living for people in many parts of the world by creating an environment of comfort and convenience in which societies can thrive and thus more easily pursue scientific and technological advancements for the betterment of all mankind. But this transformation has fundamentally altered the relationship between man and nature, upsetting the delicate balance which had existed prior to its inception. While their impact on humanity has been more or less positive, the aforementioned processes have detrimentally affected the natural environment resulting in dramatic climate change, widespread deforestation, extensive pollution of the air, and a potential mass extinction event. Despite an ever-growing recognition of these and other problems caused by the industrial revolution and the rise of mechanization, there is still an air of complacency amongst a wide swath of the world’s population with regard to the effects of modernization on the global ecosystem.

In order to showcase the vulnerability of the natural world, I felt it was important to create a work which incorporates locally threatened environments familiar to the students and faculty of CSUSM. By referencing the Santa Rosa Plateau and the Cleveland National Forest, and contrasting these areas with the adjacent towns of Murrieta and Temecula, I hoped to elicit a personal understanding of the importance of nature in the raw.

Primarily, my research consisted of gathering information about the vegetation and wildlife of the area, as well as information about its history, geology, and ecology. I was able to find much of the information I needed on government websites; the rest I sourced from books, newspaper articles, various organizations’ websites, and personal experience. The importance of personal experience in writing a poem of this nature must not be understated, for it is only

through my interaction with the natural environment that I could fully appreciate the magnitude of the threat posed by its destruction.

I believe my poem is distinguished from existing creative works in that it comes from a place of genuine concern for the ecology of the California bunchgrass prairie system, it is written by a native son of the area, and it offers unique perspectives, informed by real experience, about modern life, our purpose on the planet, and the importance of involving ourselves with the land which in many ways shapes our existence.

While some still deny a human role in climate change, or that climate change exists at all, there is overwhelming evidence that our abuse of natural resources is eroding the foundations of life on this planet and placing our very existence and the existence of future generations in peril. Though I admit to being a participant in nature's destruction by way of my begrudging acceptance of the status quo (I use gasoline and electricity generated by coal; I sometimes put recyclable material in the trash or take long showers), I believe we need to be more environmentally conscious, and that we must take steps to curb our reliance on exhaustible natural resources. Creating this poem may be just a baby step in the right direction, but it is progress nonetheless; and if it succeeds in making even a single person reevaluate their actions with regard to the natural environment, I believe it has been a worthwhile endeavor.

—Wesley Howlett