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A CLEAR VIEW OF THE MOUNTAIN
DISSERTATION

A Dissertation
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Department of English
The University of Mississippi

by

SARAH HUDDLESTON

August 2022

ABSTRACT

A collection of original short stories.

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INTRODUCTION

A CLEAR VIEW OF THE MOUNTAIN

For me, the classification of environmental and ecologically focused literature brings to mind prominent depictions of the nonhuman world, dramatic and life-changing environmental events, and descriptions of expansive landscapes either untouched or ravaged by humans. For someone who admires eco-lit as much as I do, it may be surprising that my own writing offers none of this. While the stories in the following collection, *A Clear View of the Mountain*, do contain representations of the natural world—a rock, a classroom insect, trampled grass, beachfronts peppered with garbage, rivers seeped with pollution—these portrayals are brief snippets, small mentions, and backdrops to the individual drama of the human actants. The stories here are not pastoral, dystopian, nor do they contain characters entering the wilderness and learning something from it. Certainly, it is fair to say that the stories in this collection are more character driven than setting focused. Of the twelve, five are set in the city of Portland, Oregon, three are set almost entirely indoors, and the remaining stories rely on man-made structures like carnivals, roadside attractions, and backyards. While mentions of climate change and environmental disasters are scattered throughout the collection, the characters themselves make no attempt to correct such problems. None of them are environmental activists, or activists of any kind, for that matter. What's more, despite Portland's real-world claim as one of the nation's greenest and most sustainable cities, the characters in these stories are unable or

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I say all of this not to disparage my writing but celebrate it. It is my hope that, like me, my readers are those who relish badly-behaved characters and the discord they bring. Still, I’ve always considered my work to be environmental, and it wasn’t until I finished this collection and began this introduction that I really considered this classification and why I see my writing fitting into it. I can, of course, point to those brief mentions of the natural world and climate change, or I can highlight the many mentions of garbage, a reoccurring image in almost all of the following stories. Of course, these things matter. They contribute to the world my characters live and act in, and they make visible the various systems and forces, natural or human, the characters must navigate. Yet, the more I considered, the more I realized that in my stories bad behavior specifically provides observations into humans’ relationships with others (human or non). These behaviors, such as a character cheating on a spouse, another stealing candy from her employer, and another exploiting his son to secure a spot in preschool, all offer insights not only into how humans communicate and interact with one another, but how they interact with that which is nonhuman, including natural and human made systems. The reality is that my stories are not unique in centering bad behavior while claiming to belong in the category of environmental

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Sarah Huddleston is a writer. Her essays and stories have appeared in *Quarterly West*, *Cicada*, and *Witness*. She graduated with a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from the University of Mississippi in 2019.