

The Center of the World

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Abstract

A body of water is often seen as a serene place of relaxation, but just under the surface, aquatic life bustle around. This creative narrative will spark your imagination into having you believe that you are placed in the shoes of a wandering student as you encounter this great entity, known as the *Bryant Pond*. This journey will allow you to free your mind, and let it wander as you get lost in your own imagination. Have you ever wondered how certain things came to be, such as out-of-place objects in an environment that could have naturalistically been put there, but has a very small probability of actually being real nature? The Bryant Pond is located at the center of the university campus, and is an eye-catcher as you meander around. The pond acts as a waypoint for students, allowing them to navigate the campus with ease. Surrounding the pond are various forms of the environment, ranging from trees, to grass, to weeds and reeds around the perimeter of the pond. Since the pond is a secluded area inside of the campus, how did aquatic marine life come to be in this sort of environment with no connecting bodies of water? This would allow nothing to get in or out, unless an outside factor was to come into play. Fish swim around in the pond, and that draws the question on how they got there since there are no bodies of water connecting. Birds could have been the primary individuals that caused the influx of these marine creatures through transporting eggs in their feathers, or us humans could have planted them there to reconstruct a replica pond. Knowing and “Understanding the way that fish are dispersed in remote bodies of water is important for the maintenance of biodiversity”¹, and it can expand the wildlife that lives on Bryant’s campus. Maybe the bigger question is, what relationship do we have with the environment, and what do we do to appreciate what it has provided for us?

Key Terms

Bryant pond, Creative fiction, Bryant campus, Nature, Environment

¹ “Dispersal of Fish Eggs by Water Birds – Just a Myth?” ScienceDaily. ScienceDaily, February 19, 2018. <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/02/180219103258.htm>.

Introduction

Taking a drive down Douglas Pike and enjoying the scenery, you approach the stop light in front of Bryant University; the entrance to a magnificent campus awaits you. You slowly turn onto the long road passing the Bryant University totem on your left, right before the entrance to the campus. As you drive along, you pass the President's house on your right, President Machtley's home, and as you continue along the road you notice all of the tall oak and pine trees that are dotted along either side of the road creating a smooth carving in and out of campus. A Department of Public Safety (DPS) officer sits in the booth in the middle of the road and gives you a friendly wave as you journey onwards up the road, driving yourself deep into the heart of Bryant. The townhouses dot the beginning of the campus leading into the heartland where all the action is occurring. You find a spot to park your vehicle, and begin to walk around the Bryant campus, taking in the beauty that lies before you.

Students rushing to and from class, chatting and causing a stir is what campus life is all about, excitement and knowledge-driven young adults. As you continue to pass the Douglas and Judith Krupp Library on your left and the Chase Athletic Center on your right, you see it...you see the magnificent pond lying right in the middle of the campus. Little do you know; you have feasted your eyes upon the "Center of the World" of the Bryant University Campus. You slowly make your way down the narrow gravelly path and pass a student who gives you a friendly smile, then you make your way over to a worn-out wooden bench and take a seat. You allow your eyes to wander around and observe everything around you, and you let your imagination run wild with all the things that are going on around you. A small gentle breeze swirls around you and you feel the rush of wind scurry by you and cause the arms of the tall oak trees to do a little dance and shake what leaves they have left. As you sit on that bench, all stress and emotions you are feeling

are immediately gone, and you feel at peace and very relaxed just from sitting on a bench and letting your mind relax for a moment.

A bird chirps a melody across the pond inside of its nest in a tall tree, and that causes you to snap out of your trance and take a glance over to see where the noise is coming from. You shift your position on the bench, and look around the pond to what else is going on in the section you are currently fixated on at that moment. Small reeds line the rim of the pond and your eyes get drawn to a little section of the pond just below the bridge that has a small out-cove that could perhaps be a home for some type of aquatic marine life creature. As the sun beats down on you, trees unable to protect you due to all of their leaves being gone, you look around and notice something out of the ordinary.

Based on the topography of the area, it seems a little unusual. To have all of these trees lining the pond just so perfectly, a bridge going across the middle, creating two separate sections of the joint pond, and the pathways around the pond. It all seems to surreal to have been placed there by “coincidence”, but that doesn’t stop you from appreciating the beautiful landscape you are relaxing on. The gravel softly crunches under your shoes as you relax again, and let your mind open up to everything that is going on around you. The tall reeds happily dance as the wind gently pushes them to and fro, and you happily watch them bounce back and forth. They are tightly packed along the lining of the pond and create a potential home for some type of aquatic animal.

As the time goes on, you notice a little motion going on near the bank of the pond, just opposite from where you are seated. Little ripples in the surface emerge, and you catch a small glimpse of what looks like to be a fish! As the mysterious creature darts away underneath the depths of the surface, you now become more alert and visually scan to see if you can spot this creature once again, to have it reveal its identity. Some while later, you see the creature re-emerge

from the depths of the pond, and this time you are ready. As you move about from the bench to get a good look at the creature, you notice it is only a big mouth bass swimming about keeping to itself, and it swims back off to carry on his adventure. Finally, you settle back into the bench, and take a nice long look around the pond, seeing if you can spot any other kinds of wildlife that could possibly inhabit the pond.

Pond scum and reeds could make a nice home to some kind of amphibian such as a frog, or some type of small insects. But wait, it would seem plausible that a frog could have a home on the pond, but how did the fish get there? You glance around and notice that the pond is a still body of water not connecting anywhere else, so how could these fish have gotten here?! Maybe the pond was not made to fit the campus, and the campus was built around the pond and the fish have inhabited it ever since. Many different questions race through your mind as you try to relax once again on the creaking worn down bench. After a while, you come to be at peace once again, letting all your emotions slip away as you begin to feel yourself relaxing and admire the wonderful naturalistic scene.

You notice a little gray squirrel scampering across the green lawn seeking safety from an influx of students walking along the path. Your eyes track the squirrel as it makes its way up one of the large oak trees to its nest. The bark appears to be very worn down and tired, as the branches hang faintly by the trees side as well. You look at some of the other trees to see what they are like as well. Some of the trees are being held up, bent out of shape, by thick metallic wires, to prevent them from falling over. “Now that’s not very naturalistic” you think to yourself, getting back to the squirrel. Once you lose sight of the furry creature, you look down at your watch and see it is time to get going. Your creative imaginative journey has come to an end and, you finally have to

get on with your day. Snapping out of your daydreaming like trance, you stand up, do a little stretch, and start to slowly walk away, hearing occasional crunching of leaves under your feet.

Some final questions start to come to your mind as you depart from your resting spot, “Why do we take care of the pond in the middle of the campus?”, “What purpose does the pond have for us? Is it so other kids can come here and unwind just as I did? Or do we have a purpose for the pond?”, or yet “What do we do to show appreciation for what the environment and nature has done for us?”. This will forever keep us questioning ourselves, what was the *Center of the World* like before? Even if the campus had been built around the pond, what was the terrain and the environment like? These questions will always ponder us, and keep us wondering, what the great mystery of life was like in the *Center of the World*.

Literature Review

Looking at a more realistic perspective, the Bryant Pond as we know, it serves a greater purpose than being a physical attraction on campus. What is the bigger picture we should be looking at, when we think of the *Center of the World*? What does a creative narrative have anything to do with how we as humans are affected, or we affect the pond.

Eco-poetry is one start to why the poem had anything to do with the environment. A well-known man for his works of art in the ecopoetic world is Jonathan Skinner. He worked on the Cornell Society for the Humanities for two years, 2011-2012, and founded and writes/edits the ecopoetic journals. According to Jonathan, from the eco-poetry.org website, he talks about eco-poetry as “the making and study of pastoral poetry, or poetry of wilderness and deep ecology”². Eco-poetry goes in depth into the ecological ideas of how the wilderness and the environment can be worked its way into poetry. It is about how poetry can shape ecological movements in a community or environment. Why is this important, you may be asking yourself? People do not find regular articles or websites about problems such as environmental crises to be as entertaining, so reading something similar to an eco-poem, could spark some interest or conversation. This could be an easier way to talk about natural disasters, or issues we are facing in the world today, without the harsh non-sugarcoated way the media displays it.

Just like in the narrative, it is very descriptive about the sights and sounds about what you are seeing and hearing, and for the most part it sounds very pleasing and relaxing; but does the landscape look the greatest? Some things are out of place and do not seem to fit in very well with the beautiful campus surrounding it. Having things placed in a naturalistic environment can really

² Skinner, Jonathan. “What Is Eco-Poetics?” Ecological Poetry, Literature and Graphics of Climate Crisis. Accessed October 29, 2019. <https://www.eco-poetry.org/what-is-eco-poetics-.html>.

“ruin the mood”, because while you think you are looking at nature, you are really looking at a fake scenery of what humans WANT you to believe nature is like for attraction.

A common term that always came across my research was *placemaking*. What is it? What does it mean? Is it relevant to the story? According to the Placemaking Chicago article, “What is placemaking?”, “placemaking is the basic idea of observing, hearing, and asking questions to suit the needs of people who live in a particular area to satisfy the needs and wants.”³ Placemaking is not always a bad thing, its original intention was to help bring communities and areas together under a new building or area being created in an open area of nature. Was the Bryant Pond *placed* in the middle of the campus? Where all of the trees and pathways formed around the pond for observation and decoration? The Chicago article also talks about how placemaking can bring new benefits to the area of the people who would use the recreation. It’s not supposed to be this terrible thing that ruined perfectly good landscapes or open areas of nature for human use, but it is meant to muster the idea of a happy space people can go to in order to relax or leave their woes behind and escape from reality, such as a beautiful calming pond.

When you look at the area around the pond, it doesn’t seem to be all that natural. Carved pathways filled with gravel pebbles, wooden benches drove deep into the ground which create a relaxation spot for students, trees being held up by wires because they have grown old and have started to lean over, or the stonewall surround a large portion of the top bank of one edge of the pond. Why is the area like this? Why did we leave it as is? The Bryant Community created the landscape this way, so students could enjoy a nice relaxing time away from the books, freeing their mind, and letting go of stress or worries. All of these ideas were *placed* in the landscape to provide

³ “What Is Placemaking?” Placemaking Chicago - A neighborhood guide to placemaking in Chicago. Accessed October 29, 2019. <http://www.placemakingchicago.com/about/>.

a calming state of mind for people as it provides a feeling of relaxation and bonding. The environment was created for US, and made to suit our best interests.

A well-known phrase that is used to talk about the well-being of an area is *environmentalism*. Dana Lovelady defines environmentalism as “a social movement or an ideology focused on the welfare of the environment, environmentalism seeks to protect and conserve the elements of earth's ecosystem”⁴. She talks about how the idea of environmentalism works to protect and save the natural resources of the ecosystem. Dana also talks about topics dealing with environmental issues such as the depleting resources on Earth, and mainly global warming. This is a fair way of saving the environment from companies or people who are depleting our resources such as trees or minerals, even animals. The term *environmentalism* has been around for quite a while, and early movements began around 1960-1970, despite our dependence and irrational thinking had been in motion since the beginning of time. While primarily small to medium sized groups of people gathered together to form groups for protests and they were known as *conservationists*.

These groups of people protested all over the place to prevent companies and organizations from destroying our environment. One club, inspired by Theodore Roosevelt in 1892, was the *Innovative Conservation Programs*, created the *Sierra Club*. Unfortunately, due to two World Wars and the Great Depression, these greatly surpassed the environmental issues, and the club dispersed. Following these great disasters, as technology advanced, that led to more destruction of our environment for military or industrial use. Acres of forest and land outside of cities were bruised down in order to create suburban neighborhoods, factories, or just to have them cleared.

⁴ Lovelady, Dana M. “Environmentalism.” Environmentalism | Learning to Give. Accessed October 29, 2019. <https://www.learningtogive.org/resources/environmentalism>.

The mid-to-late 1960's were known as the era of cultural movements and protests. Most of these activists were young adults, and went to very extreme, as well dangerous, measures to try and prevent the destruction of our environment.

Some people even went as far as tying themselves to trees in order to stop bulldozers or chainsaws, dumping oil into a large Oil Companies pool, or even bringing dead fish to protests to prove how dangerous the waters are for creatures. In the beginning of 1970, president Richard Nixon signed the National Environmental Policy Act, and created the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The EPA was responsible for protecting land and the environment through research, and the preservation of nature. Just like the EPA, us students, as well as members of the Bryant community, must come together to protect and preserve our campus, as well as the *Center of the World*.

As well as maintaining a well-rounded campus, Dana also talks about urban sprawl, which is “the expansion and development of land outside of cities”⁵. She talks on the idea of expanding infrastructure on untouched areas on land, thus destroying the “natural” bond between the area and its history. These demands by humans are sort of the reason why a widespread idea that we have to constantly keep expanding to keep up with the development and technology of that developing community. Unlike Bryant, we do not really expand much on campus, but what we do expand upon, we make sure to make up for what we have taken down. Such examples could be: replanting new trees, planting flowers and bushes, cleaning up dirty sidewalks and pathways, and many more.

As we narrow our focus more to on the Bryant Pond itself, it begs the question as to how the pond came to be. Was the pond and all its contents there? Or was the terrain altered to fit the needs of the wildlife living in, or around the pond. Birds have inhabited the tree branches,

⁵ Lovelady, Dana “Environmentalism.” Environmentalism | Learning to Give. Accessed October 29, 2019. <https://www.learningtogive.org/resources/environmentalism>

squirrels made themselves at home in tree burrows, but one creature that stood out was the fish. How could fish live in the pond, let alone be in there to begin with? The pond is a solid body of water with no connecting branches, so how could fish made their way in here? It could be possible that we had placed eggs in the water to create a diverse environment for the pond.

Dispersal of Fish Eggs by Water birds by the Universität Basel is a short article about how birds could possibly transfer certain eggs from a larger body of water to a smaller one with no connecting bodies, in order to create new wildlife. A conclusive study has come to be that certain eggs can survive for a duration of time outside of water, and thus giving a higher chance of a bird picking them up by their feet or feathers and transporting them, a more plausible explanation. Being conscientiously aware, and “Understanding the way that fish are dispersed in remote bodies of water is important for the maintenance of biodiversity. The knowledge of how species colonize new habitats forms the basis for the preservation of refuges and targeted reintroduction and also helps prevent the spread of invasive species.”⁶ By allowing these fish to live in the pond, possibly brought by some type of water bird, we are preserving the species of fish that lives in the pond, and can reproduce and live in the pond for a while. In order to allow this fish to live and inhabit the pond, we have to take care and maintain the environment around it. We have to be appreciative, and aware of what we are doing on campus, in order to make sure we do not harm to these marine creatures.

Kendra Heffelbower is a teacher at an elementary school in Washington D.C., and she is teaching her students all about taking care of the environment. We do not have to do these extraneous tasks in order to save the environment, but even little acts of kindness can go a long way in the long run. For example, Kendra's first grade class adopted a tree, and named it Slim

⁶ “Dispersal of Fish Eggs by Water Birds – Just a Myth?” ScienceDaily. ScienceDaily, February 19, 2018. <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/02/180219103258.htm>.

Shady. She then goes to comment, “My first graders voted to get mulch as a birthday gift because it would not only dress the tree up, but would also prevent run-off, helping Slim Shady get the necessary water and nutrients in its concrete urban setting in Washington, D.C. What I learned from my first graders that year is that, as long as I can help my students feel invested in their environment, they’ll take very good care it.”⁷ From doing this small act of kindness, the tree will be protected, and able to stay healthy for many years to come. Not only would we be attempting to protect the fish that live in the pond, but any other potential creatures that made the pond their home.

There could be a possibility that some kind of worms have burrowed themselves deep under the dirt, or some type of bacteria feeding off other bacteria. “Ponds are teeming with both animal and plant life. Some animals live in the water (fish, crayfish, tadpoles, etc.)”⁸ Many different types of sea critters could possibly be living below the surface of the water, but we are not really sure what lies below the depths of the pond. We can always be imaginative of what the Bryant Pond can be like, whether it’s from a relaxing standpoint, an environmental view, or even someone who wants to be a good citizen and try and preserve it!

Rachael Carson is a writer that expresses much interest in imaginative world of opening up your mind, and subjecting yourself to her creative narratives to get you in the mindset as to where, and what she is talking about. *The Edge of the Sea* is a wonderful example. Right off the bat, Carson says “The edge of the sea is a strange and beautiful place.”⁹ We have no idea what the

⁷ “Q&A: Teaching Students to Appreciate, Enjoy, and Save the Environment.” edCircuit, April 19, 2018. <https://www.edcircuit.com/teaching-students-appreciate-enjoy-save-environment/>.

⁸ Pond Life Animal Prinouts- EnchantedLearning.com. Accessed October 30, 2019. <https://www.enchantedlearning.com/biomes/pond/pondlife.shtml>.

⁹ Carson, Rachel, and Sue Hubbell. *The Edge of the Sea*. (page 1) 1st Mariner Books ed. Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1998.

edge of the sea is like. It is constantly changing from the waves, humans changing it, and other natural factors. We can admire the edge of the sea for the natural beauty it is, providing a divider between two worlds, one of the land, and the other the ocean. For being such a simple comparison, Carson explains how well the two clash against each other, and what animals or creatures live in these regions, what the terrain could be like, or even using silly stories to go in depth of the two separate regions. Just like the edge of the sea, Bryant has its own edge, the bank, between the pond and the walkways we take every day. Much can be said about the two different worlds that are being lived. One from the marine life, and one from the human life. All this can be said, is what goes on, inside the *Center of the World*.

Conclusion

While humans are socially accepted into the world, what about animals and creatures of the aquatic variety? These creatures need a home to live, just as much as we do, so why not allow them to live in the *Center of the World*, or the Bryant Pond for short. Whether it is trying to create a stable environment for them to live in, maintaining that environment, or creating a future environment for the next generation, it is our duty as humans to appreciate nature and all it has done for us. No matter what the landscape or environment was or like, we should be civil citizens and take care of this sacred pond, not only because it is an important symbol to our campus, but it provides a place of safety, and relaxation. Not only does the pond serve an important part of our lives, but in return we must cherish and take care of it as well. Else, we should be taking care of all of the environment, not just what looks the best. For example, if we were actively conscious of what we were doing to our campus, such as putting toxic chemicals into the air or ground. Students tend to leave garbage around the ground, and it could blow into the pond and begin to pollute it or harm the marine life. Another example would be being aware of what we do with our trash and

recycle. We have a bad tendency of putting one item in the other bin or just the trash because we are too lazy to figure out which bin the item goes in. If us humans work together to take care of, and maintain our environment, then the environment will do its part and take care of us.

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