

## The Impact of War and Environmental Issues Depicted Through Starhawk's Select Novels

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### Abstract

The World War II has been a great predicament for the United States of America in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Starhawk's select novels of this study, *Walking to Mercury* (1997) and *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (1993) are concerned significantly with the World War II and the corresponding environmental impact. This circumstance forms the background setting of the select novels of Starhawk. She illustrates the authoritative elements, political and economic condition throughout these novels. This study focuses on the chronological projections of War elements as they seem to be the fundamental cause for the environmental havoc. After the Second World War the City seems to have been destroyed with the political powers and the environment also demolishes it slowly. This study highlights the development of war and the invasion into the country. The protagonist of the novel *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (1993) struggles to defeat the army with the fifth sacred element of the cosmos.

**Keywords:** Starhawk, *The Fifth Sacred Thing*, *Walking to Mercury*, *City of Refuge*, Environmental havoc, chronological projections of war

Starhawk is an American writer and activist, born on 17 June 1951. She focuses on feminist Neo-paganism and Ecofeminism. The term 'Neo-paganism' means a modern religious movement that seeks to incorporate beliefs or ritual practices from traditions outside the religions of the main world especially those of pre-Christian Europe and North America. It is nature worshipping and is a form of nature religion. Her Ecofeminism links between the life-giving Mother Nature with the life-giving of ability of women through birth in addition to the link between the ecological destruction and patriarchal oppression under the male-dominated western political economics. Her writings and activism promote equality for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. Starhawk argues that society's patriarchal culture of authority results in domination and violence.

Starhawk has written several books and has also contributed works in other media. Her works have appeared in translation in Spanish, French, German, Danish, Dutch, Italian, Portuguese, Polish, Czech, Greek, Japanese and Burmese. Her non-fiction works are *The Spiral*

*Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* (1979), *Dreaming the Dark: Magic, Sex and Politics* (1982), *Truth and Dare: Encounters with power, Authority and Mystery* (1988), *Webs of Power: Notes from the Global Uprising* (2003), *The Earth Path: Grounding your Spirit in the Rhythms of Nature* (2004), *The Empowerment Manual: A Guide for Collaborative Groups* (2011). Her fictional works include *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (1993), *Walking to Mercury* (1997), *The Last Wild Witch* (2009), and *City of Refuge* (2015) which is a sequel to *The Fifth Sacred Thing*.

Starhawk's novels *Walking to Mercury* (1997) and *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (1993) analyse the consequences of the Second World War, through Nevada that gets demolished by the political powers and environment degradation also. Starhawk beautifully explores the background of the novel, namely, Second World War and Vietnam War of the city.



[https://www.amazon.com/Walking-Mercury-Maya-Greenwood-Starhawk/dp/0553378392/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?crid=2280JF34TIE25&dchild=1&keywords=walking+to+mercury+by+starhawk&qid=1620271655&sprefix=Walking+to+Mercury+%2Cstripbooks%2C235&sr=8-2](https://www.amazon.com/Walking-Mercury-Maya-Greenwood-Starhawk/dp/0553378392/ref=sr_1_2?crid=2280JF34TIE25&dchild=1&keywords=walking+to+mercury+by+starhawk&qid=1620271655&sprefix=Walking+to+Mercury+%2Cstripbooks%2C235&sr=8-2)

In her novel *Walking to Mercury* (1997), Maya Greenwood is the protagonist. She is a thirty-eight year old writer in Northern California. This book is based on the personal and spiritual background of the character Maya and her soul lovers Rio and Johanna. In the personal background, she sets on pilgrimage to Nepal, and she carries her backpack which contains her dead mother's ashes as well as letters and journal entries from past and personal lovers fiery Rio Connolly and earthy Johanna Weaver. Maya goes on the trip to Nepal to find her estranged sister Debby. Together Maya and Debby can heal their fractured family bonds permitting Maya to finally lay her past to rest and breathe new life into her future. Nepal serves as a framing device for Maya's probing of the past especially the secret that Rio is the father of Johanna's

child. She begins to climb the past memories through the landscape of memories. The Journal given to her by Johanna Weaver explores the teenage rebels how they suffered and how they have been challenged by convention. It also reveals Johanna's fierce commitment to her African foremothers. The letters given to her by Rio Connolly explore her dreams they once built together as outlaws, blazing a path for change. If she rejects Rio's offer, she will not have the opportunity to reclaim her past. But if she goes back to him, she will reveal the secret of Maya's vision for future. Young Maya accompany joins the anti-war movement and she enters into a relationship with the abusive alcoholic Rio.

In *Walking to Mercury* (1997), Maya emerges rich in wisdom, humour and the luminous power of nature and the spirit of the Goddess. Finally, she gathers the strength to destroy and seek her own true path of life. It takes her to Manhattan to the mountains of Mexico.

Travelling through the landscape of memories helps Maya reclaim her past and her vision of future events in the other novel, *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (1993). Maya's love with drunkard Rio, and her support to build the people's park in San Francisco are portrayed here. After that she becomes a well-known writer and teacher of ritual and magic workshops but when her mother dies of cancer Maya begins to question her "open, bisexual, long- running affair" with Johanna and her relationship to nature.

Starhawk's *Walking to Mercury* (1997) presents her vision of a future in which power is redefined and women's realities are celebrated. This prequel focuses on Maya Greenwood, a rebellious centenarian and enlisted in revolutionary politics during the '60s, Maya lived underground for years after and discovered herself as a witch and a ritualist.

Patricia Monaghan analyses Starhawk works as "Starhawk's vision of the union of personal life, spirituality and politics to be invigorating and inspiring" (Monaghan, 2004). In the end of the novel Starhawk connects all the loose ends, predictably enough at a political demonstration at a nuclear test site in Nevada.

The title of the novel, *Walking to Mercury* (1997) leads the character into the next level of the story. The word "Mercury" is a place, it is portrayed as a prison. The characters Rio Connolly and Maya finally joined in this place. The novel it appears to be a spiritual journey of the protagonist Maya Greenwood. But it leads in the end as a war field in "Mercury". Both escape from that place and it is compared to how they escaped from their misunderstanding and sorrows. Mercury leads characters in a new end, and it is the beginning of the future generations. Merlin Stone, author of *When God was a woman* (1976) and *Ancient Mirrors of Womanhood* (1979) expresses the journey as

"Exciting, magical and rich with extremely important treasure maps for those who really care about life and the survival of our planet". (Merlin Stone, 1979)



[https://www.amazon.com/s?k=the+fifth+sacred+thing+by+starhawk&i=stripbooks&crd=23DV3H0V1XVJ&prefix=The+Fifth+Sacred+Thing+%2Cstripbooks%2C223&ref=nb\\_sb\\_ss\\_ts-doa-p\\_1\\_23](https://www.amazon.com/s?k=the+fifth+sacred+thing+by+starhawk&i=stripbooks&crd=23DV3H0V1XVJ&prefix=The+Fifth+Sacred+Thing+%2Cstripbooks%2C223&ref=nb_sb_ss_ts-doa-p_1_23)

Starhawk's second novel, *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (1993) is a post-apocalyptic novel set in 2048 in California. It is considered as Utopian and dystopian fiction. The main character of this novel is divided into two ways. While one is connected to the military and religious control, the other characters are connected to nature. The story begins with harmony of Four Sacred Things that sustain life - - earth, air, fire, and water. The main three characters shown around the Black Dragon House are Maya, Madrone and Bird. Maya is the protagonist of the novel who lives in San Francisco in the 1960s. After that she establishes the consensus based system of government, The Council and having worked together to reverse the environmental degradation of the land, water, and air in the revolution of 2048. Maya spends much time to communicating with the spirits of Johanna and Rio, two of her lovers from her life who have died. Johanna's granddaughter Madrone is one of the powerful healers and dreamers of the city. Her intellectual treatments are traditional and herbal oriented. She clearly understands the medicinal value of the world. Her knowledge for medicine is highly professional and her services are equally extended between the city and rebel groups in Southlands.

In the introductory part, Bird, Maya's grandson, is unconscious as he is sentenced by the stewards' army for ten years in the south. After that he overcomes the physical and mental troubles and escapes for a return to the North. At that time Stewards have been invading in the city. Simultaneously, Bird arranges the rebel groups with the help of the Council and that Community decides to send Madrone as a medical healer and ambassador to the South. While on her journey, Madrone acts as an evangelist in both the rebel groups and as a viable alternative to the racist, sexist, and fundamentalist system of the Stewards and Millennialists. Stewards army invades into the City and they face nonviolent, non-cooperation rather than violence. They kill many of the residents. Even though they take violent activity, some of the soldiers find racial and cultural harmony in the city. People begin to question the leaders about

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water and other resources as some of the places turn to be deserts. The Stewards army recaptures Bird and forces him to reveal the 'secret weapon' of the City. Finally, they break the spiritual strength of the city and their soldiers plan to destroy the residents of the city. However, the confidentiality about what they mention as secret weapon gets revealed at the end and that gives a serendipitous turn to the story.

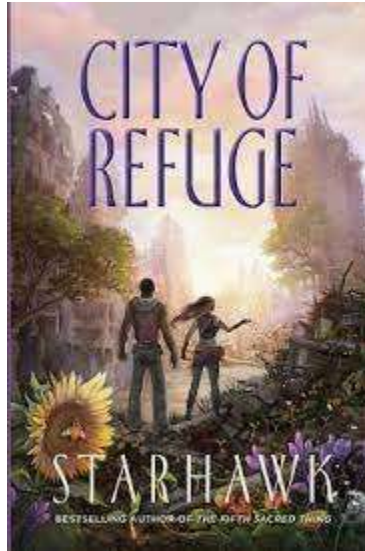
Starhawk analyses *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (1993) using Utopian and Dystopian concepts. The story explores the struggle between the two nations Utopia and Dystopia against each other. A Utopian concept focuses on the wealth of the city like streets turning to be gardens, gardens that grow real food, free-flowing streams, people of all races and religions live in harmony, effective natural techniques in showing respect for the earth and all the living things. In Northern California people survive amidst eco catastrophes, war, and epidemics. These are based on respect for the Four Sacred Thing - Air, Earth, Water and Fire. It is also known as Ecotopian country.

According to the novel *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (1993), Utopia is a place "where women are leading societies but are doing so with the consent of men" (Starhawk, 1993). Marion Zimmer Bradley, author of *Mists of Avalon* (1993), says, "Slated to be one of the great visionary Utopian novels of the century" (Bradley, 1993).

The Dystopian concept mainly focuses on the lack of the facilities like water and medicine that result in suffering of people especially during war. The novel *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (1993), analyses the environment through the spiritual orientation flowing from Ecofeminism and Ecotopian Fiction. The Ecotopia gives the healthy future for upcoming generations. According to San Francisco Chronicle, this is "A valuable contribution to Ecotopian Literature" (San Francisco Chronicle, 1993). The Library Journal states, "This strong debut fits well among feminist futuristic, Utopic, and dystopic works by the likes of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Ursula LeGuin, and Margaret Atwood" (Library Journal, 1993).

The title of the novel, *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (1993), justifies the significant roles of the sacred elements, namely Air, Water, Fire and Earth in the story. The fifth element is not the Sky but the Spirit. This is the secret weapon revealed in the end of the story. Spirit is the major element, and it is connected with other sacred things. They believe the spirit as their soul and it becomes real in the end. Author compares the Sky to the Spirit indirectly.





Courtesy: [https://www.amazon.com/City-Refuge-Fifth-Sacred-Thing/dp/0996959505/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?crd=2TJPZFUL2E6E4&dchild=1&keywords=city+of+refuge+starhawk&qid=1620272209&s=books&prefix=city+of+refuge%2Cstripbooks%2C305&sr=1-2](https://www.amazon.com/City-Refuge-Fifth-Sacred-Thing/dp/0996959505/ref=sr_1_2?crd=2TJPZFUL2E6E4&dchild=1&keywords=city+of+refuge+starhawk&qid=1620272209&s=books&prefix=city+of+refuge%2Cstripbooks%2C305&sr=1-2)

Starhawk's third novel *City of Refuge* (2015), which is the sequel of *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (1993), is published in January 2016. In the end of the *Fifth Sacred Thing* (1993), they succeed in their non-violence resistance to the Stewards army with the sacred elements. The sequel of *Fifth Sacred Thing* (1993) describes how they establish and overcome the war and deprivation. Starhawk's writing in early 2012 has been inspired by her involvement with Occupy Oakland. Starhawk foresees the need of the city as a plaza, a hearth, and a sacred tree. The story begins with the violently destroyed world of 2048. It cracks the city into eco-catastrophes and societal breakdown. When the Stewards of the southlands are invading the country, they defeat the residents using the non-violence and magic. Even though the army destroys the sacred things and residences of the people, the Council and the people rebuild the lost with the help of their sacred things, namely, Air, Fire, Water and Earth. Madrone, a healer council struggles to recover the wounds of war and deprivation. The Steward's army departed in the way of River which leads to South lands. Bird finds his deeper power of musician. All the characters and the council rebuild their hope to change as a new world.

*Walking to Mercury* (1997) creates the awareness for scientific development. The most prominent environmental degradation happens because of the scientific development. Many environmentalists analyse the environment problems. For instance, A famous historian and environmentalist, Ramchandra Guha says in his book named *Environmentalism: A Global History* (1999) that "nature became the source of raw material as well as a sink for dumping the unwanted residues of economic growth" (Guha, 1999). Another reference from Arundhati Roy's essay "The Greater Common Good" (1999) argues about the upcoming dangers of the future generations. She is an intellectual and environmentalist and is concerned with two major issues such as Narmada Bacdao Andolan and the movement against Nuclear weapons in India.

The third world countries will be facing poverty and shortage of funds and land for shelter. These countries must save themselves from the environmental degradation. There are many authors who express their thoughts related to the wastage of war in their works: Madhav Gadgil, Vandana Shiva, Medha Patkar and Wangari Maathai. These writers are concerned about the sufferings of the poor people and their survival for shelter in Nature. The most important environmental problem is money based society.

Likewise, Starhawk's second novel *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (1993) explores the condition of the city during the time of World War and the sufferings of the people in the city. Starhawk portrays the war elements through the Stewards and Millennialists of the society. They are indirectly compared to the contemporary politicians and how their activities affect Nature. Stewards are the most dangerous persons, and they control the government. They have controlled all the sacred things especially water supplies. Millennialists are joined together against the people. They form many purities, rules, and regulations for the people.

Starhawk's perspectives deciphered from *Walking to Mercury* (1997) and *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (1993) are testified through the major problems of the environment arising due to the industrial development and technical progress of the world. Besides, she also illustrates how the human behaviour served only havoc to the entire environment due to the above stated reasons. The essential problems observed from the select novels are lack of water supply, endangered species add to the environmental degradation resulting from deforestation, pollution, and lack of medical facilities. She explores the war events and combines sacred things along with the characters to suit the flow of the story. Her vision purely expresses the political and economic levels of the society.

The major factors for environmental degradation are population, industrialization, and urbanization. The environmental degradation occurs due to polluted air, water, sky, and land in metropolitan cities. Starhawk overtly clarifies how the scientific developments and biodiversity destroyed natural resources.

This paper throws light on the scientific progress of the world, utility of nuclear weapons and bio war through the prominent characters Maya, Madrone and Bird. The future of the universe and its "sustainable development is defined as the development that satisfies the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to satisfy theirs" (Brundtland, 1987). It is noteworthy to observe that the above stated evaluation is made towards the holistic protection of this ecosystem comprising plants, animals, spices and genes and all ecosystems of Nature. This report emphasizes the necessity to protect the ecosystem from degradation by curtailing the production of the destruction caused by scientific weapons and inventions by which the entire world may be maintained as the best habitat for human race and other species.

In the apocalyptic novels *Walking to Mercury* (1997) and *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (1993) set in 2048 Starhawk has created the magical or fairy or eco-Disney land. However, it will be the real future in the year 2048 with respect to the novel. Starhawk demonstrates the dystopian and utopian structure of human life in *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (1993) with the help of imaginary world and their struggles. Starhawk even visualizes the upcoming dangers like ‘water ration cards for limited water supply’, lack of medical facilities and lack of availability of drugs. The characters play an important role to describe the sustainability and ecological balance in both novels, *Walking to Mercury* (1997) and *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (1993).

To sum up Starhawk’s observations of the environment, her experiences rendered to society to preserve the environment, her feministic perspectives corresponding to ecosystem have lighted up both her novels that are set in 2048. These utopian science fictions foresee the future as struggle to live without the sacred resources, namely, air, water, earth and fire. Even though there are several environmental foundations and organizations that suggest preserving the water supply and energy, the green house effects, and population, yet they are not in control. Instead, the prevalent menaces of the world seem to be increasing diseases resulting from biowar, drugs and immune boosters.

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