

And on the Eighth Day, God Created Rhetoricians: A Case Study of the Creation Museum

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Since 1994, Ken Ham and his ministry organization Answers in Genesis (AiG) have “proclaim[ed] the absolute truth and authority of the Bible with boldness” and attempted to “relate the relevance of a literal Genesis to the church and the world today” (Answers, “Mission Statement”). AiG accomplishes these ends through a variety of means. The organization owns a publishing house that prints hundreds of texts (including school textbooks, a monthly magazine, and a research journal). It boasts a stable of twenty-three lecturers, twelve of whom have PhDs in the natural sciences. Ken Ham even produces a weekly radio broadcast, carried by hundreds of affiliate stations in forty-seven states. But the most innovative tool AiG uses to attain its goals is the Creation Museum in Petersburg, Kentucky.

Opened in 2007, the Creation Museum is the tangible space in which Answers in Genesis literally exhibits its beliefs. According to AiG’s publicity materials, “The Bible speaks for itself at the Creation Museum” (Answers, *Creation Museum Souvenir Brochure* 38). Visitors traverse the Dinosaur Den, which showcases life-size models of dinosaurs; an entire room simulating the construction site of Noah’s ark; and an exhibit devoted to Charles Darwin and the concept of natural selection. These exhibits and others comprise the “Walk through Biblical History,” wherein visitors “[w]itness the true time line of the universe unfold” (Answers, “Exhibits”). One can also “rocket through galaxies” at the Stargazer’s Planetarium or “experience the wonder of God’s creation” in the “Men in White” Special Effects Theater (Answers, *Creation Museum Souvenir Brochure* 6–7). After taking in the exhibits, patrons can explore “a chaos of colors” in the botanical garden, which contains over six thousand varieties of plants, and a petting zoo where children can encounter wallabies, goats, and a zonkey¹ (32). The Creation Museum experience ends in the Dragon Hall Bookstore, where you can buy AiG books and DVDs, Creation Museum apparel, dinosaur toys, and sour-cream-’n’-onion-flavored crickets.

There are many creationist positions, including Old Earth Creationism and Intelligent Design theory; AiG espouses the tenants of Young Earth Creationism (YEC). The YEC doctrine is based upon the concept of “biblical inerrancy,” the idea that “the Bible, as the revealed word of God, is itself without error in its original writings” (Pennock 8). Adherents of YEC assert that God created the universe *ex nihilo* six thousand years ago, a cataclysmic flood occurred around four thousand years ago, and humankind lived in harmony with dinosaurs prior to the biblical fall of man. These beliefs are widely held; according to a 1999 Gallup Poll, 45 percent of Americans believe in Young Earth Creationism (McClure 204).

Popular media outlets have often criticized the museum; NPR’s Barbara Bradley Hagerty called it “as much a Bible museum as an attempt at science” (qtd. in Siegel). In the *New York Times*, Edward Rothstein claimed, “The Creation Museum stands the natural history museum on its head.” Scientists, too, have written volumes critiquing creationist ideology (see Pennock; Pigliucci;

Sarkar), but rhetorical scholars have largely overlooked the subject. In a 2009 essay, “Resurrecting the Narrative Paradigm: Identification and the Case of Young Earth Creationism,” Kevin McClure applied his refurbished narrative paradigm to YEC, but scholars have yet to build upon his analysis.

This article examines the rhetoric of the Creation Museum’s arguments, rather than assessing their validity. Building on McClure’s work and drawing on Ernest Bormann’s fantasy theme analysis, I will show how the Creation Museum seeks to build rhetorical community by catering to sympathetic patrons, reinforcing their faith in YEC. It is important for rhetorical communities to strengthen members’ beliefs because this is one of the primary ways in which they motivate members to uphold their principles and ultimately sustain themselves. Bormann states: “[M]ost communities will evolve communication episodes designed to renew the faith, to celebrate the community, and to rekindle the zeal” of their beliefs; the Creation Museum is one of these “evolved” episodes (“Symbolic Convergence Theory” 59).

Spanning seventy-thousand square feet, the Creation Museum could warrant volumes of analysis, but rather than inspecting every nuance of this institution, my analysis focuses upon portions of the Creation Museum’s overarching narrative, the “7 C’s of Biblical History”—Creation, Corruption, Catastrophe, Confusion, Christ, Cross, and Consummation. *Creation* deals with life in the Garden of Eden; *Corruption* details humans’ fall from grace and its dire consequences; *Catastrophe* teaches viewers about the judgment human sin inspired in the form of the Great Flood; *Confusion* explains how the development of religions led humans further away from God; *Christ* and *Cross* relay the story of Christ’s coming and crucifixion; and *Consummation* conveys the importance of following Christ’s word so that God can create a new Eden in which believers can live. Each of the first four individual “C’s” has an exhibit devoted to it; the final three are covered in the form of a video presentation entitled *The Last Adam*. This analysis treats the rhetorical content of this series of exhibits.

This article begins with a literature review that, first, justifies museums as rhetorical artifacts and situates the Creation Museum within museum theory; second, it outlines my theoretical framework: Bormann’s fantasy theme analysis, his rhetorical form “fetching good out of evil” (a derivative of the Puritan jeremiad), and Paul Messaris’s mechanisms of visual persuasion, foundational to museum analysis. With Bormann as my analytical frame, I examine the various rhetorical techniques the Creation Museum uses to fortify believers’ faith by showing the intrinsic beauty of Eden, depicting calamities within the post-fall world, and positing the inerrancy of scripture.

Literature Review

The Creation Museum within Museum Theory

A museum is commonly envisioned as an objective space that displays artifacts relevant to a culture or humanity at large; the *Oxford English Dictionary*’s definition supports this idea: “A building or institution in which objects of historical, scientific, artistic, or cultural interest are preserved and exhibited” (“Museum”). A number of scholars have proclaimed that the museum is as much a cultural experience as an aesthetic one. Ragsdale et al. suggest that the very existence of a museum can facilitate a group’s cultural identity (7). They cite the example of the Louvre as a definitive cultural artifact of France; its vast repository celebrates not only the artworks themselves but France’s status as “the most civilized and sophisticated country in the world for whose taste it is the arbiter” (10). However, this claim is not an irrefutable statement; Ragsdale and colleagues

emphasize that it is the *persuasive message* the Louvre's administrators and curators wish to convey to the public. Museums can communicate persuasive messages; they are argumentative spaces. And since the Creation Museum conceptualizes itself as presenting absolute Truth to viewers, it acts as simultaneously an artifact of YEC and an argumentative space.

Affirming Ragsdale et al.'s position on the museum's role in facilitating group identity, Karp states, "Museums and their exhibitions are morally neutral in principle, but in practice always make moral statements," noting that "[t]he alleged innate neutrality of museums . . . is the very quality that enables them to become instruments of power as well as instruments of education and experience" (14). As museums are thought to be institutions of objective knowledge, they are often overlooked as potentially rhetorical, making them ripe for rhetorical analysis. In analyzing a museum, Gurian argues, critics should be aware of those responsible for producing exhibits: "An exhibition is a cultural artifact that articulates a producer's visions, biases and concerns," implying that the analysis of a particular museum allows critics to understand an exhibitor's worldview and how it is reflected in the content of an exhibit (178). AiG is very clear in articulating its worldview and goes to great lengths to ensure that the Creation Museum provides an experience consistent with its doctrines.

Answers in Genesis visualizes the Creation Museum as presenting absolute Truth to visitors, classifying it as an "establishment organization." To ensure that it spreads this Truth, the Creation Museum employs various techniques that distinguish it from other museums. This process starts with the museum staff itself. Karp observes, "Even within a single museum the staff may have differing attitudes and orientations; moreover, because they are organizations composed of diverse personnel with different interests, museums have difficulty developing an internal consensus and clearly defined objectives" (11). To combat the potential for internal dissent, AiG requires all job applicants to provide a salvation testimony, creation belief statement, and confirmation of agreement with the AiG statement of faith. In fact, nearly every listing for a job with AiG lists as the applicant's primary responsibility "Promote the Answers in Genesis & Creation Museum mission" (Answers, "Jobs at Answers in Genesis"). By ensuring that every employee believes in YEC, AiG guards itself against resistance to its stated mission.

A second strand of museum theory emphasizes a familiar rhetorical issue: the importance of taking audiences into consideration. Baxandall argues that all exhibitions consist of three distinct entities—"makers of objects, exhibitors of made objects, and viewers of exhibited made objects" (36). These three entities act independently but ultimately combine to create the communicative meaning and interpretation of an exhibition. Gurian elaborates upon the importance of an exhibit's audience but emphasizes the power of the exhibitor: "I suggest that the resultant product—the exhibition—must have embedded within it either agreed-upon assumptions about the audience or a coherent view of the audience as articulated by a single prevailing power source" (189). The Creation Museum has both of these necessary components; as hegemon within this particular space, AiG assumes it is catering to a largely sympathetic audience and therefore presents a worldview congruent with their patrons'.

Finally, to ensure that exhibits convey a consistent message, the Creation Museum deviates from standard museum arrangement. Chandler Screven, onetime director of the International Laboratory for Visitor Studies, contends that "[m]useum learning is self-paced, self-directed, [and] non-linear" (qtd. in Gurian 181). At the Creation Museum, just the opposite is true. While visitors can see the exhibits at their own pace, the museum is designed to take patrons incrementally

through the seven C's of biblical history. By making only one linear path available to visitors, the Creation Museum allows for a single interpretation of the presented content, one that its viewers already agree upon.

Bormann, the Jeremiad, and Visual Persuasion in the Creation Museum

Ernest Bormann's symbolic convergence theory (SCT) posits that through interaction, individuals are able to create communicative common ground and subsequently form a *rhetorical community*. As these communities interact over time, certain ideas are assimilated or excluded from their common parlance. Bormann calls this process the "chaining out" of *fantasy themes*, the common ideas that are retained by a particular group. Fantasy themes may evolve over time, but *fantasy types* arise as several similar themes recur. As communities' fantasy themes expand to a cultural scale, they are synthesized into a *rhetorical vision*, the "unified putting-together of various shared scripts which provides a broader view of a culture's social reality" ("Symbolic Convergence Theory" 53).

In Bormann's original theory, rhetorical visions are the culmination of symbolic convergence, but subsequent work suggests that the *rhetorical form* may have more significance on a universal level. Rhetorical forms are "recurring patterns of discourse which cut across rhetorical visions"; for example, Cragan identified the "stock action line of conspiracy that has appeared in many different rhetorical visions" as a rhetorical form (Bormann, "Fetching Good Out of Evil" 130–31). In his 1977 "Fetching Good Out of Evil," Bormann proposed another rhetorical form, inspired by a type of Puritan sermon known as the *jeremiad*. The jeremiad, named for the biblical prophet Jeremiah, consists of a simply constructed plot in which humans enter a covenant with God and, "failing to live up to their agreement, become sinful and then experience a time of troubles as the result of their sin" (131). The story ends in one of two ways: either people seek a course of action to end this time of troubles, or they continue to dishonor the covenant, sinking further into sin. My research will show how the Creation Museum appropriates the jeremiad in an effort to further reinforce believers' faith and charge them to testify to nonbelievers the truth of YEC.

This analysis will be conducted via Bormann's research approach that correlates with symbolic convergence theory—fantasy theme analysis. In his article "Fantasy Theme Analysis: Theory vs. Practice," Charles E. Williams submits a four-step process for conducting such a project. First, one must identify recurring fantasy themes within a rhetorical community and reconstruct their rhetorical vision. The types of themes garnering the most attention include "patterns of characterizations . . . of dramatic situations and actions . . . and of setting" (Bormann, qtd. in Williams 15). Second, the target audience must be identified, for "if the critic is going to discuss the reactions of an audience, s/he should identify that audience" (Williams 18). Following that, a critic must discern whether these fantasy themes have indeed been adopted by the rhetorical community. Finally, "After having established the fantasy theme(s) and that they have indeed been caught up by . . . the identified audience, the critic may then proceed to interpret their motivating effect" (19). For the purposes of this project, steps 2 and 3 have already been conducted. Believers have been identified as the target audience, and it is clear that the fantasy themes have been adequately assimilated by this community, as exemplified by the very existence of the Creation Museum. The main task remaining is the construction of the rhetorical vision and interpreting its effect upon believers.

As already noted, the Creation Museum is arranged to tell the story of biblical creation. This narrative provides the foundation for the institution's rhetorical vision and can be divided into three

different fantasy themes: *Idyllic Eden*, *The Wages of Sin*, and *The New Covenant*. *Idyllic Eden*'s central character is God, with Adam and Eve in supporting roles. The central action is God's creation of the universe and the fantasy theme's setting, Eden. An equally important action is the forging of a covenant between Adam and God, providing a segue into the second fantasy theme. *The Wages of Sin* takes place in the post-fall world, involving Adam, Eve, nonbelievers, and the museum patron. The significant actions within *Wages* are Adam's original sin, the ensuing sins of humans, and God's punishment through the Great Flood. *The New Covenant* directly involves the patron's connection to God through Christ as redeemer. This bond of salvation is solidified through belief in biblical inerrancy. The setting of *The New Covenant* is strictly theoretical; to reward believers for their devotion, God will create a new Eden in which believers can enjoy an eternal life free from sin.

One can easily detect parallels between the Creation Museum's rhetorical vision, comprised of these three fantasy themes, and the rhetorical form of the jeremiad. *Idyllic Eden* corresponds to humans' original covenant with God; *Wages* provides "a deeply meaningful explanation of the presence and purpose of evil"; *The New Covenant* mimics the jeremiad's happy ending, in which "the community is to fetch [good] from . . . evil . . . and atone for their sins" through action (Bormann, "Fetching Good Out of Evil" 134). Having drawn these analogues, we can examine the Creation Museum's exhibits in relation to the Puritanical jeremiad.

While significant emphasis will be placed upon the content of various exhibits, a secondary level of analysis lies in how artifacts are presented to the viewer. As Gurian notes: "[I]t is not content that predetermines the exhibition design, strategies, and installations we use; rather, exhibition content and presentation are separable. While much has been written about the choice of content . . . very little has been written about choice or style as an expression of intention" (176). In "The Museum as a Way of Seeing," Svetlana Alpers adds:

The way a picture or object is hung or placed—its frame or support, its position relative to the viewer . . . the light on it . . . and the other objects it is placed with and so compared to—all of these affect how we look and what we see. (31)

As with any argument, whether oral, written, or visual, arrangement and presentation contribute substantially to the effectiveness of a rhetorical act. By examining exhibits' presentation style, as well as an exhibit's position in relation to others, this analysis will be better capable of discerning the Creation Museum's intended message.

Ragsdale and associates have outlined a set of theoretical instruments with which to analyze this dimension of museum analysis. Considering museums to be rhetorical and visually persuasive artifacts, they appropriate Paul Messaris's three foundational concepts of visual persuasion: *iconicity*, *indexicality*, and *syntactic indeterminacy*. While Messaris's work deals with visual persuasion in advertising, these three concepts are applicable to any visual artifact, including museums.

Iconicity is the ability of an image to elicit a "preprogrammed" response from a viewer. Messaris argues that as an individual encounters visual stimuli, an emotional response is elicited based on "the unique experiences of each individual . . . the common, shared influence of culture and . . . biology"—these together comprising, essentially, an individual's reality (xiii). For example, the Creation Museum presents visitors with images of various biblical figures, arousing their feelings of reverence for these individuals based on a lifetime of learning about them. Thus, iconicity allows the museum to create images that imitate patrons' reality, and produce a desired emotional response.

Indexicality is the use of an image “as documentary evidence or proof” to prove that a particular event happened (Messaris xvi). Ragsdale et al. suggest that indexicality is particularly strong because of our cultural assumption that “pictures don’t lie” (4). By providing concrete examples of the biblical creation story, the Creation Museum solidifies these events in reality to the viewer, making the museum an exercise in indexicality; every scientific proof, piece of label copy,² and animatronic dinosaur serves as evidence that the Genesis account of creation actually happened six thousand years ago.

Syntactic indeterminacy is the juxtaposition of two or more images used to lead audiences to a particular conclusion. Messaris admits that visual syntax lacks “a set of explicit devices for indicating causality, analogy, or any relationships other than those of space or time” (xviii). However, he argues that this insufficiency actually works in a rhetor’s favor. Since visual images cannot overtly express messages like written words, syntactic indeterminacy leaves the task of interpretation to viewers, forcing them to apply their own reality to the presented images and draw a conclusion. On a larger scale, portions of the Creation Museum function as individual images, and when these are placed in close proximity to other exhibits (also functioning as individual images), viewers are led to infer the museum’s intended message. Hence, syntactic indeterminacy leads viewers to deduce the Creation Museum’s intended message by making viewers unconscious participants in the arguments the museum presents.

Ragsdale et al. emphasize syntactic indeterminacy in the context of the museum because it is the most frequently used technique; iconicity and indexicality are used in exhibits, but to a lesser extent. I grant that syntactic indeterminacy is the primary tactic used in museums, but viewers are incapable of deducing their conclusions without iconicity and indexicality. The Creation Museum itself is indexical in that it documents the Genesis account of creation, and the images presented are simultaneously iconic, as they draw upon believers’ feelings of affinity for biblical figures. Syntactic indeterminacy serves as the final synthesis of exhibits, as viewers transfer their esteem for biblical characters onto the museum’s message. All three of Messaris’s concepts are necessary: the Creation Museum uses iconic and indexical images to provoke syntactic deduction.

Although many theoretical frames may be suitable for the analysis of museums, fantasy theme analysis is appropriate for this particular study on two levels. First, as this literature review has shown, both museum theory and the fantasy theme method assert the importance of audience in assessing the arguments of rhetors and specifically museum exhibitors. Second both theories hold emotions as a central mechanism of creating meaning. As Bormann indicates, “the critical analysis of emotional appeals is illuminated by the process of fantasy theme analysis” (qtd. in Williams 15). Relating to museums, Gurian references Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton’s book *The Meaning of Things*. Their work suggests “that it is the emotional overlay we place upon impersonal objects that transforms them into objects of meaning” (181–82). Synthesizing these two elements, this analysis will extrapolate the Creation Museum’s intended “emotional overlay” to believers through Messaris’s visual persuasion and place it within the frame of fantasy theme analysis and the rhetorical form of the jeremiad. Since indexicality is implied in each exhibit, this analysis will focus more on the iconicity of groups of images and the syntactic conclusions viewers are ideally led to infer. Because this project is the first to deal with the Creation Museum in a rhetorical light, close description (since the current context is not conducive to photographs) is required in order to clarify the various sections, rooms, and exhibits presented to viewers.

In the Beginning, There Was Pathos: A Visual Analysis

In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida, Baby: Idyllic Eden

The rhetorical form of the jeremiad begins with expositional information, situating humans within a covenant, or contract, with God. Princeton University's *WordNet* defines covenant as an "agreement between God and his people in which God makes certain promises and requires certain behavior from them in return" ("Covenant"). The Creation Museum displays humans' original covenant with God, in which God promised Adam eternal life in exchange for tending the Garden of Eden and refraining from eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The first C of biblical history, Creation, places patrons in the heart of Eden, emphasizing the Garden's eternal beauty and arousing viewers' desires to live in such an environment.

As visitors enter this portion of the museum, they are immediately bombarded by hundreds of specimens of artificial life. On both sides of the patrons' pathway, wild grasses spring forth, colorful flowers bloom, trees shade the terrain, and a painted river escorts the eyes to a mountainous landscape as green as its surroundings. Under this lush canopy, a handful of animals placidly gaze forward, uninterested in the passing viewers. After a brief stroll through this plastic ecosystem, the viewers come upon a menagerie surrounding a single man, who is cradling a lamb and beckoning to a cat. The label copy informs us that this man is Adam, naming the beasts of the land.

Each "living" thing in this synthetic Eden is an iconic image; as Messaris would put it, it relies upon "the common, shared influence of culture" to arouse viewers' preconceived notions of a garden, temporally removing viewers from the museum space (xiii). This paradise fills viewers with awe, drawing upon believers' conceptions not only of the generic "garden" or "jungle," but also of the Garden of Eden itself. By placing viewers in Eden, the Creation Museum uses the aroused feelings of awe to reinforce belief; the exhibitors assume that each believer wants to live in such a perfect creation.

The presentation of Eden also strengthens patrons' desires to live in paradise through label copy. Traveling through the Garden, visitors see various displays that recount the biblical events presented—Adam naming the animals, the creation of Eve, and God forbidding eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Since patrons are already familiar with these stories, labels provide ancillary texts that elaborate on life within the Garden. For example, "What Did Dinosaurs Eat?" explains that in Eden, all animals were herbivorous because "[i]n a 'very good' creation, no animal would die, so there were no carnivores";³ "Tree of Life" states, "In the garden God provided everything needed and desired for abundant life" (Genesis 2:9); "Work" declares, "In God's original plan, humans served their Creator without the burdens we experience today."

The claims made via label copy assume that the viewers believe in an Abrahamic afterlife, do not want to die, and find displeasure in their work environment. Working from these assumptions, the labels iconically characterize Eden as a place in which no living thing ever perished and life was largely effortless. This life is antithetical to the modern world, in which humans tirelessly work for their survival and inevitably die. By diametrically opposing life in the Garden to the post-fall world, the exhibit leads viewers to syntactically conclude that Eden was superior to the modern world, strengthening their desire to live in this environment.

Beyond the content of this exhibit, its placement relative to other displays has rhetorical implications. Before arriving in Eden, patrons view a series of videos that present common Intelligent Design arguments.⁴ These arguments are amplified by the design of the room in which they are presented: pristine white walls, over a dozen video screens, each mounted above a backlit image of

natural phenomena (a microscopic view of blood cells, an image of earth from space), and several benches surrounding the perimeter, encouraging patrons to take in the various presentations. The aesthetics and content of this room amplify the arguments presented in the Creation Museum's Eden. The unblemished walls, backlit images, and video screens are iconic in that they remind viewers that they are in a museum. As noted earlier, museums are seen to be purveyors of objective truth, and this room takes advantage of that perception. As viewers absorb this museum ambiance, they become more susceptible to believe in the validity of the video screens' arguments.

Building upon the museum atmosphere, the videos' Intelligent Design arguments are presented as grounded in naturalistic science. Beginning in the modern period, naturalistic science, the belief that "all hypotheses and events are to be explained and tested by reference to natural causes and events," became the authoritative philosophy of Western civilization (Forrest). Therefore, arguments based in naturalist science are perceived as definitive. Because the Creation Museum presents Intelligent Design arguments as within the scope of naturalist science, viewers are less likely to assess their scientific validity and more likely to believe them.

Museum aesthetics and naturalistic science are recurring themes within the Creation Museum, and as these brief examples indicate, they increase the validity of the Creation Museum's arguments. The iconicity of the Intelligent Design exhibit arouses patrons' feelings that they are within a space that presents genuine truth; when this is juxtaposed with the iconic images of Eden, viewers conflate the objective truth of museums and naturalist science with the "truth" of the eternally paradisiacal nature of Eden. This syntactic synthesis is the central rhetorical move of the Creation Museum; the remainder of my analysis explores how major sections of the museum function with one another to create its overall communicative message.

Abortion, Gays, and Steak: The Wages of Sin

The second section of the rhetorical form of the jeremiad depicts humans failing to meet the requirements expected of them, thereby breaking their covenant with God. Consequently, God's wrath is brought down upon humans, resulting in Bormann's "time of troubles" ("Fetching Good Out of Evil" 131). Within the Creation Museum's jeremiad, Adam dishonors the covenant by eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and the troubles manifest themselves as the introduction and proliferation of evil throughout the world; God curses the whole of humanity, producing the post-fall world and all of its calamities. A number of exhibits attempt to re-create the harsh reality of the post-fall condition, provoking viewers' desires to eradicate sin and reinscribing their sociopolitical worldview.

Temporarily departing from the 7 C's, this analysis moves to dissect how *Wages* plays out in the modern world beyond merely the existence of death and suffering. Before traveling through the "Time Tunnel" to the first C, Creation, visitors are exposed to the various ways in which secularism can destroy a society in an exhibit entitled "Modern World Abandons the Bible." The atmosphere of this room mimics a dingy urban alley, and the title is spray-painted on a boarded-up window in a style used by graffiti artists. This room's mood evokes feelings of uneasiness in viewers, as they likely associate urban living with secularism and worldliness.

Moving beyond atmosphere, the content of this exhibit follows a three-part chain of reasoning. The first premise, presented in label copy above the graffiti, postulates, "Scripture abandoned in the culture leads to relative morality, hopelessness and meaninglessness." This hopelessness is presented via a plethora of news clippings and headlines wheat-pasted to the adjacent wall, cover-

ing topics such as gay marriage, euthanasia, pornography, school shootings, drugs, and terrorism. Under the assumption that believers will revile these subjects, the news clippings play upon patrons' views on social issues to magnify the crisis of secular society. Also of note is the fact that "Modern World Abandons the Bible" reads like a newspaper headline; when this is juxtaposed with credible news sources, viewers syntactically conclude that the exhibit's title is equally true.

The second premise posits, "Scripture compromised in the church leads to scripture abandoned in the home." The church compromising scripture is exemplified by a large wrecking ball labeled "Millions of Years" embedded in the foundational bricks of a church. The phrase "Millions of Years" on the wrecking ball deprecates some Christian denominations' adaptation of a metaphorical or figurative reading of Genesis. Karp argues, "When cultural 'others' are implicated, exhibitions tell us who we are" (15). Therefore, by introducing an "other," the Creation Museum arouses feelings of disdain for other brands of Christianity and encourages viewers to identify themselves as Young Earth Creationists to preserve the sanctity of the church.

The final premise of this exhibit concludes, "Scripture abandoned in the home leads to a generation no different than the world." This piece of label copy is placed above an artificial edifice of a home containing three box windows. Each of these windows contains a video screen dramatizing a different scenario: a teenage boy smoking marijuana, a teenage girl considering getting an abortion, and a housewife suspecting her husband of infidelity. All of these scenarios exemplify problems within the secular world, but their placement within the "home" is especially powerful. By looking into a home, viewers are led to enthymematically engage in the situation and take pride that such events do not happen in their own homes because they uphold the tenets of YEC. Together, the three premises of "Modern World Abandons the Bible" emphasize the importance of teaching scripture in the home, arouse pride in the viewer as a Young Earth Creationist, and reaffirm sociopolitical views that come with YEC membership.

Wages emerges within the second of the 7 C's, Corruption. The serpent, a red boa constrictor with horn-like protrusions on its head, presents itself to Eve, asking her, "Has God really said you shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (Genesis 3:4) ("God's Word Is Questioned"). This representation of the serpent heightens patrons' recognition of the appearance of evil, as the color red and the horns draw upon iconic representations of Satan. The next display shows Adam and Eve sharing the proverbial "forbidden fruit," preparing viewers for the disturbing exhibit that follows.

After seeing Adam and Eve consuming the outlawed produce, viewers turn a corner into a room entitled "The World's Not Safe Anymore," the bleakest of displays at the Creation Museum. The impersonal atmosphere of this room floods the senses as viewers take in the concrete walls and front door of a dilapidated home. The title of the exhibit is carved in the door, which has eight different locks fastened to it, setting the tone for the images to come. Turning away from the door, one encounters a series of dimly lit photographs documenting a child whose stomach is swollen from malnourishment, a wolf voraciously feeding on another animal, a mushroom cloud, a mass grave containing dozens of human skulls, a woman in extreme duress during childbirth, a tornado, a man injecting heroin, and rows of grave markers from Arlington National Cemetery. As powerful as these images are, "The World's Not Safe Anymore" does not limit itself to still photographs; it is a multimedia presentation of the horrors of the post-fall world. Opposite these startling images a video loop is projected onto another decrepit wall. The video shows stock footage of an infant riddled with warts, Nazi soldiers marching, German concentration camps, communist soldiers on parade, mass graves, and tanks firing heavy artillery rounds. While these images are being

absorbed, patrons' ears are bombarded with cacophonous sounds of loudly spoken German (presumably one of Adolf Hitler's speeches), an infant's sobs overdubbed with machine gun fire, and the shrill drone of a heart monitor flat-lining.

The troubling stimuli within "The World's Not Safe Anymore" exemplify iconicity because they all serve to arouse some sort of negative emotion within the viewer. The atmosphere of the room itself creates sullen fear, as it is unlikely that viewers wish to live in an area necessitating eight locks on the doors to their homes. The images depicting natural disasters, physical pain, and addiction produce feelings of dread, stemming from audience desires not to experience such misfortune. Further, by evoking images of nuclear arms, Hitler's Germany, and the Cold War, utter horror is generated through aversion to bloodshed and socially conditioned disdain for Nazism and communism. All of these emotions are compounded by the repeated invocation of children. Viewers become overwhelmed with sympathy for the children who live in this unforgiving environment, intensifying their already fervent repulsion at the post-fall world.

Within the context of the Creation Museum, this exhibit serves two functions. As the first exhibit seen after Adam and Eve break the covenant, this room leads patrons to conclude that the horrors the images show are a direct result of disobeying God's word. Furthermore, all of these images document recent infamous events, so they resonate with present-day viewers. It is also important to note that this room is completely experiential. There is no label copy explaining the images' significance—the lack of mediation only serves to create deeper dread in the viewer and arouse curiosity as to what could bring about these disturbing images. These feelings of dread and curiosity, intensified by the immense volume of stimuli presented, overload the viewers' senses and make them more apt to believe the explanatory information in the following exhibit.

As patrons leave "The World's Not Safe Anymore," a piece of label copy entitled "Curse" informs them, "Because of man's rebellion against His word, God cursed the creation." In the display that follows, viewers are taken into another artificial environment to see the changes brought about by God's curse. Ousted from the Garden, Adam and Eve now inhabit a small plot of land where Adam raises crops while Eve weaves fabric, tends to the home, and raises the couple's children. As visitors travel through these new surroundings, several pieces of label copy explicate the adverse conditions of post-fall life. "Cosmic Pain" declares, "With Adam's sin, death and suffering entered the creation," along with disease and natural disasters. Separate placards also explain that poisons, carnivores, cosmic aging, conflict, burdensome work, and even weeds were all introduced after the fall. By describing the difficulties and complications that entered the world with sin, the Creation Museum hopes to arouse contempt in its patrons for the post-fall condition.

This contempt is sharpened by the viewers' previous experience of "The World's Not Safe Anymore," as some of the curse's repercussions are analogous to the unsettling images presented in that exhibit. For example, the frightening pictures of mass graves and natural disasters correspond to the presence of death and catastrophe in the post-fall world. By conflating the modern images of "The World's Not Safe Anymore" with biblical examples of God's curse, the latter's premises are indirectly strengthened through syntactic indeterminacy. Furthermore, these two exhibits build upon the arguments presented in *Idyllic Eden*; the unpleasant life of post-fall humans reinforces the beauty of life before the fall, strengthening patrons' desires to live in a perfect creation.

The third C of biblical history, Catastrophe, gives viewers a severe example of God's judgment upon humans in the form of the Great Flood. The first exhibit in this section, a replica of Noah's

ark, is “built to actual scale [and] represents 1% of the total volume of the original” (Answers, *Creation Museum Souvenir Brochure* 20). The label copy in this display discusses the actual size of the ark and the methods used to build it, but this is not the true purpose of the exhibit. It is intended to “stop the viewer in his or her tracks, to convey an arresting sense of uniqueness, to evoke an exalted attention”; a concept Greenblatt calls “wonder” (42). The spectacle of the construction site is iconic, producing Greenblatt’s feeling of wonder in the viewer. The amazement inspired by the exhibit opens patrons’ minds to the Creation Museum’s account of the flood, presented within the ark itself in a series of dioramas and a video loop.

The first diorama shows the completed ark in all its glory, scaffolding still going up its hull and a large ramp leading to the enormous entrance. On this ramp pairs of elephants, giraffes, and brontosaurus make their way into the ark while two bulls and two sheep wait patiently for their turn. The next display takes place in the midst of the flood. Those who have yet to perish are taking refuge on large rock outcroppings, waving their arms and calling out to the ark. The final diorama shows the ark perched upon Mount Ararat with the floodwaters receding. The mid-flood diorama is the strongest iconic image, rousing viewers’ horror at the prospect of drowning in a catastrophic flood.

These dioramas are enhanced by a video loop dramatizing the flood, à la the nuclear bomb dream sequence in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. While this reference to popular culture might seem irrelevant, the loop’s resemblance to an action-movie sequence is effective rhetoric in that its high production value and sophisticated special effects bring the flood to life for viewers in a format they are familiar with. Together, the construction site, dramatic dioramas, and action-packed clip all serve to show the direst of consequences of sin in the post-fall world, charging believers to eliminate sin from their lives.

A secondary effect of the Creation Museum’s portrayal of the flood lies in its placement within the 7 C’s. The fantasy theme of *Wages* culminates within this series of exhibits, showing God’s harshest of punishments, far more severe than the introduction of carnivores or weeds: death on a grand scale. These visions of death are the last repercussions of sin presented, and their immediacy lingers with viewers, leading them to unite the concept of sin with the prospect of another catastrophe happening. As a result, patrons are more willing to believe the doctrines presented out of fear that such a disaster could occur once more.

Workin’ on a Road to Gloryland: The New Covenant

The jeremiad typically concludes in one of two ways: either humans continue to live a life of sin or they curtail their wicked ways to reconcile with God. This final section of the jeremiad is its lynchpin because it directly engages the audience. As Bormann notes, the jeremiad became “a plan of action which was providential, the path of salvation furnished by God” (“Fetching Good Out of Evil” 132). As such, the story’s outcome rests upon audiences’ shoulders; if the audience members atone for their sins, God rewards them by greatly improving their condition; if not, they continue to suffer God’s wrath. Within jeremiads, rhetors often prescribe specific actions to the audience as avenues for redemption, and the Creation Museum is no different. In order to escape the post-fall condition, patrons must believe wholeheartedly in the tenants of YEC and accept Jesus Christ as their savior. If these conditions are met, God will forge a new covenant with believers, creating a new Eden in which they can live eternally with God. To convince patrons of the validity of YEC, the Creation Museum attempts to establish the inerrancy of biblical scripture.

Since YEC holds biblical inerrancy as its foundational principle, it is imperative that the Creation Museum establish the infallibility of God's word early in the museum experience. The very first exhibit in the Creation Museum, "Different Starting Points," establishes the framework through which the Bible is to be viewed. This framework creates a dichotomy between God's word and human reason, claiming that although all scientists have the same physical evidence to examine, creation scientists rely upon a different frame of reference than the others: "the words of the eternal, perfect God" (Answers, *Creation Museum Souvenir Brochure* 8). Label copy in this exhibit explains that God "has instructed us to use the Bible as our ultimate starting point (Proverbs 1:7) and also to reject speculations that contradict God's knowledge" (2 Corinthians 10:5).

The other side of this coin is human reason. Instead of relying on God's word, the rest of scientific inquiry depends on "the words of temporal, fallible men" (Answers, *Creation Museum Souvenir Brochure* 8). Casting further doubt on human reason, "Different Starting Points" argues that those who advocate it as an interpretive frame "are prone to misinterpret the facts around them because their starting point is arbitrary." These expository pieces attempt to characterize human reason as inferior by describing it as "temporal," "fallible," and "arbitrary," while God's word is "eternal" and "perfect."

On the same piece of label copy, the jeremiad's emphasis on choice comes into play: "Every person must make a choice. Individuals must choose God's Word as the starting point for all their reasoning, or start with their own arbitrary philosophy as the starting point for evaluating everything around them, including how they view the Bible." The rest of this exhibit influences the patron's choice of starting points, pitting each perspective's explanation of scientific phenomena against the other. "God's Word" restates the YEC model of speciation by "kind"⁵ and the youth of the universe; alternatively, "Human Reason" presents the long history of the universe from the Big Bang to the evolution of human beings. Assuming that visitors already disagree with these scientific theories, this exhibit causes guests to side with God's word by default. Even if viewers harbored any doubt, God's word dictates that they must reject any ideas that contradict it. The Creation Museum outlines the sinner's righteous path very early in the experience, positioning itself as a mediator to redemption and, within the jeremiad, guiding viewers to faith in order to put an end to the sinful ways of the world.

Conclusion

My research examines the ways in which spaces can be used to reinscribe an audience's beliefs in a particular ideology. Within the Creation Museum, the trope of "museum" is co-opted to enhance the credibility of presented arguments. But this trope may also be used to reinforce other ideologies. For example, the preserved Dachau concentration camp uses the museum trope to maintain horror and disgust for the Holocaust. Moreover, spaces can preserve ideologies without using the museum trope; government spaces like the White House and Senate chamber, for example, embody American ideals.

A second thread of my analysis investigates how the trope of scientific discourse is appropriated to embellish YEC as a valid educational alternative to evolution. Despite the Supreme Court's 1987 decision in *Edwards vs. Aguillard*,⁶ creation science continues to flourish in the American consciousness through teaching in churches, home-school curricula, and even universities. To build upon this article, one may look to the literature of creation science, further examining how the sci-

entific trope is employed within textbooks and/or research articles; one could even assess the validity of creationism's scientific models and proofs.

The Creation Museum represents a microcosm in this larger debate between evolutionary and creationist science. As YEC represents the beliefs of 45 percent of the American population, its discourse is becoming more and more prevalent; the *Left Behind* series of novels has sold sixty-five million copies (compared to *Twilight's* eighty-five million), and evangelical groups like Ray Comfort's Way of the Master produce weekly television and radio broadcasts, to name a few examples. In order to better understand creationism, it is important for rhetorical and communication scholars to examine these popular representations of the doctrine. As rhetorician Michael McGee declares, "If one wants to understand how a particular term or idea has cultural meaning . . . rather than investigating academic or philosophical discussions of the topic, one focuses on the public discourse surrounding it" (qtd. in Sloop 6). By analyzing these popular representations, scholars can mold their interpretation of these artifacts and anticipate audiences' potential reactions to them.

Notes

¹ A hybrid of a donkey and a zebra.

⁷ The explanatory information displayed on placards throughout museums.

³ All citations of label copy are taken from a 2009 visit to the Creation Museum and photos thereof. The relevant exhibit title is given in the text. Where appropriate, each citation of label copy will include parenthetically the biblical verse from which it is derived (in this case, Genesis 1:30).

⁴ For example, the existence of the elaborate structure of DNA or the apparatus of the human eye lacks a reasonable explanation other than an intelligent creator—the argument, essentially, is that such a complex universe couldn't have happened by coincidence.

⁵ YEC asserts that God made each animal "after its kind," meaning God created a prototype of each type of animal—"Horse," "Monkey," etc. (Genesis 1:25). Variation of species occurs only within each type.

⁶ The court ruled creationism to be an inherently religious worldview, thereby making it unconstitutional to teach it in American public schools.

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