

Extract 1: This Other Eden by Paul Harding

*In the opening extract from the Booker-Prize shortlisted novel Benjamin and Patience land on Apple Island, where they - and their descendants - will make their home*

5 Paul Harding 22 September 2023

Benjamin Honey—American, Bantu, Igbo—born enslaved—freed or fled at fifteen, only he ever knew—ship’s carpenter, aspiring orchardist, arrived on the island with his wife, Patience, née Raferty, Galway girl, in 1793. He brought his bag of tools—gifts from a grateful captain he had saved from drowning or plunder from a ship on which he had  
10 mutinied and murdered the captain, depending on who said—and a watertight wooden box containing twelve jute pouches. Each pouch held seeds for a different variety of apple. Honey collected the seeds during his years as a field-worker and later as a sailor. He remembered being in an orchard as a child, although not where or when, with his  
15 mother, or with a woman whose face over the years had become what he pictured as his mother’s, and he remembered the fragrance of the trees and their fruit. The memory became a vision of the garden to which he meant to return. No mystery, it was Eden. Years passed and he added seeds to his collection. He recited the names at night before he slept. Ashmead’s Kernel, Flower of Kent, Duchess of Oldenburg, and Warner’s King.  
20 Ballyfatten, Catshead.

After Benjamin and Patience Honey arrived on the island—hardly three hundred feet across a channel from the mainland, just under forty-two acres, twelve hundred feet across, east to west, and fifteen hundred feet long, north to south, uninhabited then,  
25 the only human trace an abandoned Penobscot shell berm—and after they had settled themselves, he planted his apple seeds.

Not a seed grew. Benjamin was so infuriated by his ignorance that over the next year he crossed to the mainland whenever he could spare some time and sought out orchards  
30 and their owners in the countryside beyond the village of six or seven houses, called Foxden, that stood directly across the channel from the island, and traded his carpentry skills for seeds and advice about how they grew and how to cultivate the trees and their fruit.

35 Benjamin and Patience and their sons and daughters and grandsons and granddaughters and great-grandchildren kept more and more to the island as time passed, but in the final years of the eighteenth century it was not as dangerous as it came to be later for Black man to range the land. Any able-bodied adult who kept peace and lent a hand surviving was accepted. So the story went among his descendants. So, Benjamin rambled  
40 around and found farms where he could help raise a barn or split shingles or clear an acre for crops and came home with seeds that quickened and struck roots and elaborated themselves into the shapes of his remembered paradise.

Roxbury Russets, Rhode Island Greenings, Woodpeckers, and Newtown Pippins. Benjamin  
45 Honey kept an orchard of thirty-two apple trees that began to bear fruit in the late summer of 1814, a decade after he planted them. Pippins were perfect for pies, Woodpeckers for cider. Children bit sour Greenings on dares and laughed at one another

when their eyes watered and mouths puckered. Russets were best straight from the tree.

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Benjamin Honey surveyed his orchard in the cooling air and sharpening, iridescent, ocean-bent sunset light, the greens and purples deepening from their radiant flat day-bright into catacombs of shadowed fruit and limb and leaf. It felt as if his mother were somewhere among the rows. She might step from behind a tree in a white Sunday dress that took up the shifting light and colors and smile at him. He inhaled the perfume, salted, as everything on the island, and took a bite of the apple he held.

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On the first day of spring, 1911, Esther Honey, great-granddaughter of Benjamin and Patience, dozed in her rocking chair by the woodstove in her cabin on Apple Island. Snow poured from the sky. Wind scoured the island and smacked the windows like giant hands and kicked the door like a giant heel and banked the snow up the north side of the shack until it reached the roof. The island a granite pebble in the frigid Atlantic shallows, the clouds so low their bellies scraped on the tip of the Penobscot pine at the top of the bluff.

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Esther drowsed with her granddaughter, Charlotte, in her lap, curled up against her spare body, wrapped in a pane of Hudson's Bay wool from a blanket long ago cut into quarters and shared among her freezing ancestors and a century-old quilt stitched from tatters even older. The girl took little warmth from her rawboned grandmother and the old woman practically had no need for the heat her grandchild gave, no place, practically, to fit it, being so slight, and so long accustomed to the minimum warmth necessary for a body to keep living, but each was still comforted by the other.

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The island a granite pebble in the frigid Atlantic shallows, the clouds so low their bellies scraped on the tip of the Penobscot pine

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Esther's son, Eha—Charlotte's father—rose from his stool and one at a time tossed four of the last dozen wooden shingles onto the embers in the stove. The relief society inexplicably had sent a pallet of the shingles to the settlement last summer. There was no need for them. Eha and Zachary Hand to God Proverbs were excellent carpenters and could make far finer cedar shingles than these. But as with each of the past four years, summer brought food and goods from the relief society, and some of the supplies were puzzling to the Apple Islanders, like the shingles, or a horse saddle, once, for an island that only had a handful of humans and three dogs on it. With the food and stock also came Matthew Diamond, a single, retired schoolteacher who under the sponsorship of the Enon College of Theology and Mission traveled from somewhere in Massachusetts each June to stay in his summer home—visible on the mainland in clear weather 300 yards across the channel, in the village of Foxden—and row his boat to Apple Island each morning, where he preached, helped with a kitchen garden here, a leaky roof there, and taught lessons in the one-room schoolhouse he and Eha Honey and Zachary Hand to God Proverbs had built.

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Useless spalt anyway, Eha said, closing the woodstove on the last of the shingles.

95 Tabitha Honey, Eha's other daughter, ten years old, two years older than her sister  
Charlotte, scooted on her behind across the cold floor to get closer to the stove. She  
wore two pairs of stockings, three old dresses, a donated wool coat the society had sent,  
and the one pair of shoes she owned, boy's boots passed down from her big brother,  
100 Ethan, when he'd outgrown them. They were too big for her and she'd stuffed the toes  
and heels with dry grass that poked out of the split soles like whiskers. Tabitha wore  
another square of the Hudson's Bay blanket wrapped over her head and shoulders.

C'mere, Victor, Tabitha said to the cat curled behind the stove. Tch, tch, c'mere, Vic.  
She wanted the cat for her lap, for some warmth. Victor raised his head and looked at  
105 the girl. He lowered his head back down and half-closed his eyes.

I hope you catch fire, you no-good hunks, Tabitha said.

Ethan Honey, fifteen, Eha's oldest child, sat on a wooden crate across the room, in the  
110 coldest corner, drawing his grandmother and little sister with a lump of charcoal on an  
old copy of the local newspaper that Matthew Diamond had given him last fall the day  
before he closed up his summer house and returned to Massachusetts. The boy's nose  
was red, his lips purple. His fingers and hands were mottled white and blue, as if the  
blood were wicking into clots of frost under their skin. He concentrated on his  
115 grandmother and sister and their entwined figures came into finer and finer view across  
the front page of the Foxden Journal, seeming to hover above the articles about the  
tenth annual drill and ball, six Chinamen deported, a missing three-masted schooner, ads  
for fig syrups, foundries, soft hats, and black dress goods.

120 Victor raised his head and looked at the girl. He lowered his head back down and half-  
closed his eyes

Tell us about the flood, Grammy, Tabitha said, still eyeing the cat.

125 Charlotte lifted her head from her grandmother's breast and said, Yes, tell us again,  
Gram!

Ethan looked from his drawing to his grandmother and sister and back. He said nothing  
but wanted as much as his sisters for his grand- mother to tell the story about the  
130 hurricane that had nearly sunk the island and had nearly swept away his whole family.

Eha went from the stove to the corner opposite where Ethan drew and tipped a basket  
sitting on a shelf toward him and looked into it.

135 I'll fix these potatoes and there's a little salt fish left, he said. A can of milk, too.

You want to hear about the flood? That old flood? Again? Esther Honey said.

Yes, Gram, please!

Please, Gram, tell us!

140 Well, that old flood was almost a hundred years ago, now, she began.  
Way back in 1815.

Comments:

'Masterful . . . [This Other Eden] has much to say to our times.' *Guardian*

145 'A testament of love . . . so real it could make you weep.' *Danez Smith, New York Times*

'A luminous, thought-provoking novel.' *Esi Edugyan, author of Washington Black*

150 *Set at the beginning of the twentieth century and inspired by historical events, This Other Eden tells the story of Apple Island: an enclave off the coast of the United States where waves of castaways - in flight from society and its judgment - have landed and built a home.*

155 *Benjamin Honey- American, Bantu, Igbo- born enslaved- freed or fled at fifteen- aspiring orchardist, arrived on the island with his Irish wife, Patience, and discovered they could make a life together there. More than a century later, the Honeys' descendants remain, with an eccentric, diverse band of neighbours. Then comes the intrusion of 'civilization': officials determine to 'cleanse' the island, and a missionary schoolteacher selects one light-skinned boy to save. The rest will succumb to the*  
160 *authorities' institutions or cast themselves on the waters in a new Noah's Ark.*

*Full of lyricism and power, Paul Harding's This Other Eden explores the hopes and dreams and resilience of those seen not to fit a world brutally intolerant of difference.*

165 *'Harding invites comparisons with authors such as William Faulkner, Robinson and even Elizabeth Strout . . . This Other Eden . . . begs to be widely read.'* *Spectator*

<https://www.penguin.co.uk/articles/2023/09/extract-this-other-eden-paul-harding>

170 *Second extract :*

*This Other Eden by Paul Harding*

*Published by Penguin Random House U.K.*

175 *Bridget Carney had an afternoon alone to herself so she spent it in the library. Mr. Hale had left for Concord that morning and once she finished cleaning up after breakfast she was free. A spring storm blew across the yard beyond the high windows. The trees at the borders bowed in the gusts of wind and straightened in the pauses and rain swept in sheets across the greening grass. Water poured from the corners of the roof and braided and tailed away from the windows and seemed to be drawn spinning back up into the sky*  
180 *then dashed back against the house and sounded like buckets of nails tossed against the shingles and glass. The white sky filled the room with a bright silvery-white gray light and Bridget did not light any lamps. She sat in one of the deep upholstered chairs arranged in front of the dark fireplace and listened soundless and still to spring blustering and whisking up new flowers and greening the grass, blowing across the open*  
185 *mouth of the chimney three floors above, and sounding wide hoarse intermittent notes through the firebox she imagined was a song of promise and upheaval played by the presiding spirits of April— the same spirits, she thought, as she thought of her mother*

and father, as those that tumbled and crashed over her cottage back home, just beyond the southwestern tip of the Dingle Peninsula in Ireland, on Great Blasket Island.

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The winds calmed at intervals and the room descended and settled into deep silence, deeper than no sound, into deeper denser depths of the season, and stray, fat dollops of rain spattered singly or in pairs or quartets in sequence against the wet wood or wet glass, against the perfect silence of the stilled outside air. The silence sharpened the bright silvery-white gray light and the light sharpened the colors in the room and the outlines of the gold mirrored clock on the wall and the black and white etchings of the tulips and anemones and their black frames, and the black and white rubbings of the knights in their armor from the Italian gravestones, and the red and black and brown spines of the books on the shelves, and the gold lettering embossed into them, and the leather on the chairs, and the upholstery on the couch and the wooden tables and brass and porcelain and pewter lamps on them, and the livid crimson of the Persian rug and the mossy green and gray-blue flowers and rust-colored vines woven across it.

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Overnight, the storm would almost surely make sleeping uncertain for her, the noise and roaring in the dark unsettling, and she'd possibly even end up provoked, tired, grouchy the next morning when she came to the kitchen, and after she ate her toast the racket with the crockery and china would make her want to complain out loud although no one would be there to hear her, the only other person in the house old Mr. Hale, Thomas Hale, up in his rooms, looking out the windows or at a copy of Milton or Ovid. But for the hour, nothing could have quieted her more, hushed her heart, soothed her into perfect melancholy peace more than the mild violent rejuvenating tigers of spring charging the length and breadth of Enon.

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That night she slept deeply and without interruption. The fitfulness she had worried about during the afternoon never came to pass and as soon as she closed her eyes she dropped like a diver in a bell into the depths of sleep. She woke the next morning with no recollection of having dreamed, but she did have a sense of recently having been traveling with thrilling speed, and underwater, she realized, as well, of perhaps being shuttled to waking clinging to the knobbed back of a torpedoing whale, perhaps returning her from a secret visit back to her home, where she'd stood on the dark familiar beach and looked at the dim silhouette of her cottage on the slope, sorrowful, but comforted knowing her parents were asleep inside, perhaps themselves dreaming of her standing on the beach in the dark, asking her, Why have you come home, Bridget?

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Why have you come back to us from the water?

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[https://www.outlookindia.com/books/book-excerpt-this-other-eden-by-paul-harding-weekender\\_story-313854](https://www.outlookindia.com/books/book-excerpt-this-other-eden-by-paul-harding-weekender_story-313854)

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235 *Third extract :*

*Full of lyricism and power, Paul Harding's spellbinding novel celebrates the hopes, dreams and resilience of those deemed not to fit in a world brutally intolerant of difference*

240 *Inspired by historical events, This Other Eden tells the story of Apple Island: an enclave off the coast of the United States where castaways - in flight from society and its judgment - have landed and built a home.*

*In 1792, formerly enslaved Benjamin Honey arrives on the island with his Irish wife, Patience, to make a life together there. More than a century later, the Honeys' descendants remain, alongside an eccentric, diverse band of neighbours.*

*Then comes the intrusion of 'civilization': officials determine to 'cleanse' the island. A missionary schoolteacher selects one light-skinned boy to save. The rest will succumb to the authorities' institutions - or cast themselves on the waters in a new Noah's Ark...*

A hurricane struck in September of 1815, twenty- two years after Benjamin and Patience Honey had come to the island and begun the settlement, by which time there were nearly thirty people living there, in five or six houses, including the first Proverbs and Lark folks, the ones from Angola and Cape Verde, the others from Edinburgh – Patience herself from Galway, Ireland, originally, before she met Benjamin on his way through Nova Scotia and went with him – and three Penobscot women, sisters who'd lost their parents when they were little girls. A surge of seawater twenty feet high funneled up the bay, sweeping houses and ships along with it. When the wall of ocean hit, it tore half the trees and all the houses off the island, guzzling everything down, along with two Honeys, three Proverbs, one of the Penobscot sisters, three dogs, six cats, and a goat named Enoch. The hurricane roared so loudly Patience Honey thought she'd gone deaf at first, that is, until she heard the tidal mountain avalanching toward them, bristling with houses and ships and trees and people and cows and horses churning inside it, screaming and bursting and lowing and neighing and shattering and heading right for the island. Then she knew all might well be lost, that this might well be the judgment of exaltation, the sealed message unsealing, that after they'd all been swept away by the broom of extermination there'd be so few trees left standing a young child would be able to count them up, and their folks would be scarcer than gold. But not all gone. Not everyone. Patience knew. Some Honeys would persist, some Proverbs survive. A Lark or two might endure. So, for reasons she could never afterward explain, she snatched the homemade flag she'd stitched together from patches of the stars and stripes and the Portuguese crown and golden Irish harp shaped like a woman, who looked so much like a figurehead and always reminded her husband of the one on the front of the ship he'd been a sailor on, that had sunk off the coast and brought him to the island in the first place, and the faded, faint squares embroidered with Bantu triangles and diamonds and circles that he'd carried with him everywhere, that he showed her meant man and woman and marriage and the rising sun and the setting sun, that he always said were his great-grandfather's, although she in her heart of hearts didn't think that that could be true, and tied it like a scarf around her throat, and she took Benjamin by the hand and dragged him from their shack out into the whirlwind. She swore it was a premonition,

because no sooner had she and her husband passed out the door than the house broke loose from its pilings and tumbled away behind them, bouncing and breaking apart into straw like a bale of hay bouncing off a rick and into the ocean. Now that she stood in  
285 the open, facing the bedlam, her legs would not work. She was sure that this was the Judgment and what was to be was to be; it was useless to try to outrun the outstretched arm of the Lord.

Benjamin roared to her over the roaring storm, The tree, the tree! And he pointed to the  
290 tallest tree on the island, the Penobscot pine, at the top of the bluff . Benjamin pointed and leaned his face toward his wife's and pointed.

Up the tree!

295 The water hit the south shore of the island first and swallowed it whole and smooth. Then it hit the jagged bedrock spine running up the middle of the island and broke over it hissing like a saw blade

300 <https://thebookerprizes.com/the-booker-library/features/an-extract-from-this-other-eden-by-paul-harding>