

# MEJO

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## **Echoes of the Earth: Interplay of Literature and Landscape**

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## Editorial Note

MEJO (the MELOW Journal of World Literature) is a double-blind, peer-refereed e-journal brought out annually by MELOW, the Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literatures of the World. It is a reincarnation of the previous publications brought out in a book or printed form by the Society since its inception in 1998.

MELOW is an academic organisation that is one of the foremost of its kind in India. The members are college and university teachers, scholars and critics interested in literature, particularly World Literature. The organisation meets at least once annually over an international conference. It seeks to maintain academic standards, encourages and grooms younger scholars, and provides a forum for senior scholars in literature.

The papers presented at MELOW conferences are screened, selected, edited, and published by a board of editors who are especially appointed for the purpose. However, in the initial years, the Society favoured a book publication; over the last decade and more, it has published a journal annually. With the changing times, MELOW decided to move to online publication. The result is *MEJO, the MELOW Journal of World Literature*.

MELOW releases a Call for Papers on the same theme after every conference on various academic portals worldwide. Scholars and professors from across the globe send their papers for publication every year. A panel of reviewers has selected the papers from the revised submissions.

This is the ninth volume of MEJO, the MELOW Journal. This issue contains essays selected from the 2024 conference held at Kathmandu University, Nepal, and also invited essays on the main theme.

We at MELOW wish you happy reading!

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MELOW (The Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literatures of the World) was first set up in 1998 as MELUS-India. It is an academic organisation among the foremost of its kind in India. The members are college and university teachers, scholars, and critics interested in literature, particularly world literature and literatures across borders of time and space. The organisation meets every year at an international conference. It seeks to maintain academic standards, encourages younger scholars, and provides a forum for senior scholars in literature.

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Professor Isaac Sequeira from Hyderabad, who worked at Osmania University and was closely associated with the ASRC, Hyderabad, was a mentor and patron to several generations of academics in India. His sad demise in 2006 created a void hard to fill. We at MELOW wish to keep alive the memory of our patron and guiding light, who played a key role in all the activities of our organisation. MELOW has created the Isaac Sequeira Memorial Fund, from which a special prize called the **ISM Award** is given for the best paper presented at our conferences (see the details below). \*

There is also a **Special Invited Lecture** by a person of eminence funded by the Isaac Sequeira Memorial Fund. Several individuals have come forward to offer contributions towards the corpus and donated generously to the ISM fund.

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### \* **The ISM AWARD**

- In memory of Prof Isaac Sequeira, MELOW annually awards a prize for the best paper presented at its conference. The award comprises a certificate and a cash prize of Rs. 5,000.
- The competition is open to Indian citizens who are members of MELOW. The participant/delegate should be less than forty years of age at the time of the conference and follow the stipulated deadlines, and submit the abstract along with the complete paper before it is presented at the conference.
- The MELOW Executive appoints a panel of judges.
- If required, these rules may be amended by a simple majority of members present and voting at the conference.

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## Keynote Address

# Nostalgia, Wonder and Terror: An Examination of Differing and Distancing Landscapes in Literature and Arts

*Krishnan Unni P*

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When Achilles sent his first arrow, the Greek soil of Trojan was not ripe for creating a land of flowers emanating beautiful smell. The land was dry and sordid. Many times, in the legends, we find constant escapes of the heroes to unknown land and *The Odyssey* has a number of instances that constitute the pre-landscape conditions. Before the landscapes, I ask myself, what was the land? How different it was both in terms of our perception and knowledge? How different was the land as of now and how fascinating and crude that appeared before the onlookers? How perceptible it was when the great writers of legends saw them? And how different was it when it appeared in their dreams?

Homer, as we know, perhaps was the first writer who canvassed a big battle in his mind that could ever take place in a land, which later would turn into not one but several landscapes in Western literature. The Trojan War was perhaps the first war ever fought anticipating many nations and later nationalisms. If in the West, Trojan War was the one that gave us the idea of the land and its surroundings, in the East, the Classics of course, had the power to locate the landscape before the wars that were fought on the land. Both in *Mahabharat*, *Ramayan* and in *Chilappathikaram*, we have references of landscapes, where some women used to go for a small sojourn, departing from their courts accompanied by fellow women. It was in those landscapes, gardens surrounding them, that love and romance flourished. Later, much later, the drive toward bigger lands where war is staged began. Kurukshetra, the land where the great *Mahabharat* war was supposed to have been fought, it should be remembered here, carried memories of several landscapes before its beginning. In other words, inside the Kurukshetra, we had many landscapes.

One cannot probably guess since when landscapes became part of human imagination. But one can definitely assume that landscapes were the spaces/places where one used to look at with

wonder since time immemorial. The classical times and the Greco-Roman civilizations had provided different facets of landscapes connected to the expansion of empires and furthermore, to resist their enemies. The lengthy songs in Ovid's *Metamorphosis* give us graphic illustrations of the same. With Christendom, landscapes began to change a lot with respect to the great exodus that followed after that and in some sense before that also. The Jews were the first to wander all over the globe for trade and transaction, thus exploring the landscapes and later settling on their fringes. The terrible attitude nurtured against the Jews by many religions made them parochial and never allowed them to inhabit the landscapes. The Wandering Jew, therefore, always settled on the peripheries of landscapes. This Jew, later in the 20th century was crucified to maximum, annihilated in the concentration camps and much later in our time, is still hunted and haunted by religious fanaticisms. However, it should not be forgotten that their tales always became part of literature. Right from the Renaissance depiction of Jews by Shakespeare and Marlowe in *Merchant of Venice* and *Edward II* to the powerful depiction of them by Eugene Sue in *The Wandering Jew* and later in the novel by Stefan Heyn.

What separated the Classical times from the later period is not just periodization as the great historian of the Annales school Jacques Le Joff said, but the collective identity based on myths, and more particularly on myths of origin, the prestige of the leading families that is expressed by genealogies, and the technical knowledge that is transmitted by practical formulas that are deeply imbued with religious magic" (58). The Roman poet, Virgil described the Arcadia as the home of pastoral simplicity. The early landscapes in literature, no doubt owed a lot of things to this pastoral culture spread across many lands and island in the world. In such an Arcadia as depicted in Classical literature, we find the harmonious balancing of nature. The pastoral landscapes have been percolating into poetry, drama and other sub-genres, if not in novel properly, since a long time. Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, Milton's *Comus*, Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar* and the burlesques written by John Gay had all the pastoral elements. The same pastoral underwent significant changes in the late eighteenth century, where writers giving importance to its notations began to think and construct anti-pastoral poetry depicting landscapes. But this did not mean that the pastoral did

not thrive for a long time. Again, we come across the swinging of the pendulum back to the Classical times. The need to preserve the Classical values began to get debated over the centuries and I think, this aspect significantly affected the culture of landscapes in literature. What primarily constituted the interest for the idyllic landscapes are the innocence of nature and beauty (even though not in an aesthetic sense) related to that. The idyllic landscapes had a long continuation in literatures all over the globe for a long time. I must admit here that the Industrial revolution or the later Romanticism that followed it could not completely alter the scope and space of idyllic landscapes. The real concept of the landscapes as spaces of vast swathes of land, however, started with the late seventeenth century. Parts of the globe whose nations have the land began to imagine the vast swathes of land to be a part of their imagination. This imagination, I must admit, is not a teleological one. On the other hand, this imagination constituted ideas of expansion, migration and cohabitation. After the Renaissance, the revival of Classical literature added to such imagination by turning its eyes to the Greco-Roman times and later to the fundamental question of making the land an important place for survival. One can find the urge to be in such landscapes in the writings of Alexander Pope and a few others.

The first landscape paintings came from France in the seventeenth century and most of these paintings owed a lot to the Roman landscapes. The significant impact of the Roman landscapes on European painters, needless to say, showed their interest in the Roman civilization, culture and attitudes. In the Neo- Classical times, taste was an important aspect that seeped in the landscape paintings. The presence of several European painters in Rome during the seventeenth century significantly contributed to the development of the landscape paintings genre. Albrecht Durer drew many landscape paintings, starting with his 1521 views of the lower hills. In Annibale Caracci's *The Sacrifice of Abraham*, we find the religious tensions mixed with the ideas of art. As the seventeenth century was not free from several religious persecutions and divisions, the landscape in literature and in arts also became a conscious or unconscious depiction of such things. In the painting of Caracci, the centerpiece is a tree precariously growing at the edge of a precipitous bluff, with its twisted roots laid bare by erosion. The artist gives attention to the haze surrounding the low mountains in the

distance and to the white clouds floating over the horizon. The scene of Abraham about to bring down the dagger around the neck of Isaac is unobtrusively lodged in the top left corner. This painting, undoubtedly, gave a larger dimension to the Biblical tale and related it to the wider dimensions of human landscape stating that sacrifices are not just tales of the canon, but of the landscapes. Jan Both, one of the important Italianate of the Dutch landscapists, painted a number of golden light pictures, which highlighted the Mediterranean Europe more than the religiously ridden and striven European lands.

The Flemish landscape painters, on the other hand, started viewing the landscapes as an engagement with a separate reality, the reality of mind, which again is a matter of contention for the modern art historians. Paul Biril and Peter Paul Rubens evolved their styles from Mannerist painters such as Bruegel. Peter Brrugel's *A Forest at Dawn with a Deer Hunt*, thus attracted the early imagination of several literary writes who wanted to depict a forest in words. In this painting, we see not a dense forest, but a thick one, wherein the European hunter feels like meandering in search of deer. Though the painting has the motif to talk about the deer hunt, not a single deer can be seen in the painting. On the other hand, we find in the brown and dark colored canvas, the dense trees and an uprooted tree from the hedge of the soil. Both in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, Samuel Richardson invites us along with his usual themes of adventure, virtue and attitude. When novel began as a new genre in the West in the eighteenth century, most of the novelists had the landscape paintings in their minds to steer their literary imagination. The novel took the motif of journey, a fact rarely explored by the literary historians and theorists in our time from the landscape paintings.

Aelbert Cyup's *Herdsmen with Cows* is a powerful painting that invites our attention to the simplicity of nature, which later became a contested theme for the later Romanticists. The Dutch countryside shown in the painting is absolutely enriching and serene. The employment of light and shadow in this painting is noteworthy. Over the foreground ridge, distant mountains can be seen beyond a meandering river glimpsed through the glowing mist. Connecting this painting to the journey of Joseph Andrews would look pervasive for some of you. Joseph's journey to London

exemplifies the journey through several landscapes and thick roads populated with bandits and thieves and Parson Adams, his sole companion internalizes the serenity of these landscapes. But in the eighteenth century, the real dimension of landscapes began to change with respect to colour and perspective in Western painting. One never can forget the paintings of Thomas Gainsborough's *The Wooden Landscape with a Peasant Sitting* anticipated the major landscape paintings of Turner and the Romanticism of the nineteenth century. In this painting, which attracted Turner as well as the Romantic poets such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron and others, we see the tree canopies and clouds and a peasant sitting alone. It is significant to note that the face of the peasant is not very prominent in this painting. The figure is a bit distanced and in the background a house or church can be seen indistinctively. John Constable's *The Cenotaph to the Memory of Joshua Reynolds* is a remarkable painting which brought to the surface the serenity of the country estate with a beautiful deer looking at us in the foreground. This painting attracted Shelley very much. This painting articulated the desire of the landscape as far as the 18th century women were concerned traveling in a coach, looking at the sprawled landscape where they wanted to migrate. Landscapes, thus provided a new imaginative realm for the eighteenth-century women, particularly the aristocratic women travelers in the coach, to express their desire for migration and stay. In some sense, they brought a discourse to their stultified space inside houses as domestic women. It also must be remembered that landscape literature began to challenge the male centric notions of women's views and gave a wide platform for their survival.

Set against the principles of scientific rationalism and progress, the intellectual movement of Romanticism attempted to reinvent nature based on some principles. These principles, mostly philosophical, propagated by Schiller, Schiller and Immanuel Kant found their expression in the way the human subject looked at nature. Nature, no more turned out to be a space where man inhabits, on the contrary what she/ he recreates. The best poetry of William Wordsworth was written when he was twenty years old. He never abandoned the vocabulary of the picturesque viewing and judging when he wrote:

While here I stand, not only with the sense  
Of pleasant pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts  
That in this moment there is life and food  
For Future years. (*Collected Poems*, 78)

“Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey” was the birth of a new Romantic subject, which changed the ways of human perception. On the one hand, we see the young poet describing nature and landscape plainly; on the other hand, we see him distancing himself from the past of nostalgia. Caspar David Friedrich’s *The Wanderer above a Sea of Fog* situates the realm of the nineteenth century traveler as internalized earlier by Wordsworth. As the painting depicts clearly the alienation of man from nature by urban dwellers of the industrial cities, the Romantic poets, in their attitude offered a strong critique of the industrial cities that came into existence.

The ineffable character of sensory experience and the effusion of utterance constitute the challenging parameters of Coleridge’s landscape. As Friedrich Schlegel says, “one cannot speak of poetry except in the language of poetry” (qtd. in Colley) seems to be the crux of Coleridge’s peregrinations into the wild world of landscapes. Between 1784 and 1805, Coleridge used to walk profusely in the countryside capturing images, sights and talking to the peasants and farmers. Unlike Wordsworth, he saw this landscape as a constantly transforming one. Ann C. Colley is right when she says that “the feet registered the spatial measurement of the landscape” (17). Coleridge’s poetry fused the eighteenth-century traditions of retrieving a personal consistency endangered in his daily life. His differences from Wordsworth apart, his walks inaugurated the idea that landscapes need not just to be seen from somewhere, but to be explored. Much of his landscape descriptions, I strongly contend, are attempts to control his instable authority. The Romantics, thus challenged the way to perceive the landscape, in poetry, letters and in practice. But one question still needs to be answered. Did they free the people around, particularly the peasants and the working class with their poetry? Did Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and others liberate the readers and those around into the

landscapes? This question, perhaps not answerable in their times, can be seen in the internalized ruminations of the French thinker Jean Jacques Rousseau in the late eighteenth century.

In *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, Rousseau gives us moments of palpitations of ecstasy and energy of the landscapes. Rousseau's attempts can be seen as an extension of Coleridge's and it was he who probed into the inner depths of the Self in the Western philosophy for the first time more than his companions. In the Fifth Walk, Rousseau tells us: "But it must be admitted that this happened much more easily and agreeably in a fertile and lonely island, naturally circumscribed and cut off from the rest of the world, where I saw nothing but images of delight, where there was nothing to recall painful memories, where the company of the few people who lived there was attractive and pleasing without being interested enough to absorb all my attention, and where I could devote the whole day without care or hindrance to the pastimes of my choice or to the most blissful indolence"(91). Here we find the intense interiorization of the Subject. Slowly, Rousseau develops a distaste toward the mankind and he writes: "I know that mankind will never let me return to this happy sanctuary, where they will not allow me to remain" (91). Thus, we see how the thinkers began to drive away from the landscape as haven to the interior landscape, which turned the philosophical rumination of the eighteenth century. It must be remembered here that landscape from the idea of nostalgia was turning into a space of investigation with Rousseau. There are several histories of the landscape and the inhabiting - in the constant travels—by Arthur Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche and many others. This transformation of landscape is best outlined by Raymond Williams's powerful book *The Country and the City*. Williams argues that the stabilization of the pastoral form in English, especially in the construction of the golden age of English pastoral between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries, involved, both in creative and scholarly glosses, several layers of erasure. Permanent and idyllic country life, often portrayed with the twinge of longing, erased a multitude of changes in English history and thus effectively mystified the consolidation of the forces of capitalist agriculture.



While nostalgia and wonder constituted the early elements of landscape in literature and in arts, with modernity and scientific rationality and with the emergence of the new empires, this began to change. The capitalist culture and the effective mechanisms of changing the land and agriculture, I would argue, changed the landscape with selfish interests. The tillers disappeared, those who were seen in the countryside fast moved into the cities, whose resonances can be seen in Victorian literature and in the novels of Charles Dickens. The first sound of the chopper appearing on the Italian countryside in the First World War, made the shepherds and the flocks flee. As the War began to change its dimensions from the use of the animals to machines, the trenches, the fields, and other battle grounds began to turn into spaces of emptiness. A survey of the landscapes of the West and even of the East would give us the gory pictures of disappearances and bloodbaths. The rise of States and the emerging ideologies have distorted the space of communities reliant on honest labour. The Whites or the Aryans as colonial masters and detectors effectively erased every trace of the Black bodies from these landscapes. The literary language became “petrified” in some sense as the wonder of the landscape is far removed. One can see this reflected in the novels of Flaubert and later in Leo Tolstoy. Much later, in the Bloomsbury school, this disappearance of wonder was explicated by Virginia Woolf and E.M. Forster. Idleness becomes a trope in their texts, marking the discursive limit where the protocols of desire break down in search of difference in mute world. In other words, this is the beginning of the rise of the “mental landscapes.” In most of her fiction, Woolf tried to create these “mental landscapes/ spaces” to articulate the feminine and the desire. This mental landscape, which is continuing in a variety of ways, is part of both modern and postmodern phases of literary landscapes.

One must remember here that it is the enlightened modernity that paved the way for colonialism. The colonial agendas of the advanced nations had in them the idea not just to loot and plunder, but to shape the landscape and its inhabitants according to their desire. The wealth and tranquility of the landscape began to take a different shape as the colonies began to expand in many parts of the globe including India, Caribbean islands and in South Africa. The rootedness of the natives and the immense torment undertook by the Blacks have a lot to offer us in conjunction with

the postcolonial ways of looking at the landscapes. Attempting to analyze the postcolonial pastoral, Sarah Casteel argues that mere agendas of the British to create plantations the work places for the slaves did not produce the sense of domination, but the interlinking aspect of producing “rural England the ideal home” (*Second Arrivals*, 25-60). The construction of the rural England as the haven was the major agenda of the nineteenth century British political imagination. Needless to say, most of the nineteenth century narratives roamed around the same idea, which became a part of the late Romanticism in the British writing.

Here, I would like to theorize the literary landscape of modernism. Landscape as a totalizing system of inclusion falters at this precise moment of the capitalist greed and plantation economy, in the face of global migration through slavery and indenture. Modern landscapes, I argue, are the belated territories and the spaces of exclusion engineered by the colonial mentalities. This socio-political feature of the modern landscapes appears differently in the literatures of the West and the East. It is interesting to ask in this context that when Munshi Premchand, the progressive Hindi writer wrote *Godaan*, was he really looking at land or the landscape? The constant exploitation of the landless became part of the migration desire to the landscapes by many writers. Even Rabindranath Tagore understood this desire, though his concern with nature and landscapes were different. When cities like Manchester became the Industrial cities benefiting the needs of capitalist culture, in the undivided India, during colonialism, landscapes were used for hunting the wild animals by the colonial masters. The stories of Rudyard Kipling offer us many examples. In Africa, the landscapes were internally perceived for energizing their folklores and beliefs by writers like Amos Tutuola, but it was seriously plundered and looted by the European counterparts for creating their castles. Colonialism, I state, destabilized the wonder and nostalgia of landscapes. What we see in the paintings of Constable and Turner as “turbulent landscapes” of nature became the landscapes of terror in the hands of the colonial masters. The later stages of British colonialism and the two brutal partitions of the country have turned the imagination of literary and artistic landscapes a lot. Ritwick Ghatak’s *Titash Ek Ti Nadir Naam* (*Titash, the Name of the River*) depicts such partitioned landscape in the

light of Bangladesh partition. The land and lives of women, no doubt, marked this movie as one of the prototypes of Indian feminist movies. While Ghatak was too occupied with landscapes for portraying the suffering of the poor, Satyajit Ray in his *Apu Trilogy* portrayed the rural landscape and suffering of the poor more descriptively. Both their languages were more literary than any other literary text.

In the partitioned country, the act of remembering is compulsorily tied with the act of forgetting. In the stories of Sadat Hasan Manto, we see the city landscapes emerging as areas of seclusion and danger. Manto in his stories dismantles the notion of the urban space as a safe haven and instils in us the idea of danger and unpredictability. Ayesha Jelal looks at partition as “a defining moment that is neither beginning nor end” (24). David Gilmartin in his essay “Partition, Pakistan and South Asian History: In Search of a Narrative” opens up the difficulty of articulating the history of “high history” and “popular violence.” This dispossession of land and vulnerability are cited in a popular song:

Oh dear kin, you have visited our home after a long time

What shall I offer you here at my place?

I have neither roof nor hearth

Selling of all my possessions, are bereft of all savings

I left my homeland because of partition. (*The Journal of Asian Studies*, 1068-95)

These lines mark not just the pain of leaving the rural landscapes and homes, but the tragedy of being nowhere without a landscape. A score of literature in the post-independent Indian writing deal with the issue of homelessness, which in some sense, is also the lack of landscapes. One cannot forget here the verse of Faiz Ahmad Faiz, the greatest Urdu poet who had several literary lives internalizes landscapes in pain and angst. Faiz tried to recreate the long-lost landscape in the form of love.

Of the long days when I knew you could not come

Don't ask if I thought of you or missed you very much.

Your memory alone fills the wellspring of my mind

But it is not the same as your lips, your arms and your touch. (Benin)

The sense of modern loss is resurging in these lines. However, the real sense of terror emanating from the landscape, I argue, is the post-war phenomenon. In the Western literature, one can point out endless writings articulating this. Jerzy Kosinsky's controversial novel *The Painted Bird* portrays the life of a boy wandering among the barrels, trenches and the unknown forces during the time of the Holocaust. The Holocaust created landscapes of terror and aversion. When Auschwitz was declared as a museum for posterity, one never can forget the terror it perpetrated by murdering thousands of Jews all over the world. W.G. Sebald in *The Rings of Saturn* offers us the picture of a juxtaposition—the shoal of fish and the concentration camp at Bergen–Belsen. Highlighting the decay of the landscape, Sebald writes: “An idiosyncrasy peculiar to the herring is that, when dead, it begins to glow; this property, which resembles phosphorescence and is yet altogether different, peaks a few days after death and then ebbs away as the fish decays” (*The Rings of Saturn*, 58). By juxtaposing the human bodies and fish, Sebald highlights how the postmodern landscapes are constructed out of the modern photography.

The studded landscapes of ruin and destruction began to threaten the globe in many ways. Where exactly can one find space for travel is the question. Wim Wenders's movies throw open some of the powerful questions of such landscapes. Based on the melancholy life of a person taken from the novel *The Anxiety of the Goalie Before the Penalty Kick* by Peter Handke, Wenders translates such landscape into the post-War situation of man's existence. His *Kings of the Road* projects another long travel by two companions, who desire, never reach out the object of desire, in some Lacanian sense. One must never forget here T.S. Eliot's “The Hollow Men,” who are spiritually void and the “the cactus land/ Here the stone images/ Are raised, here they receive/ The supplication of a dead man's hand/ Under the twinkle of a fading star” (*Selected Poems*, 76). Eliot's lines were the precursors of the post-War torn spaces, which created unassuming fear and dread of spaces in post-War Europe.

In 2001, when the twin towers of New York collapsed by the Taliban attack, the dimensions of the urban landscape began to change radically. This was the siren call for a new urban space, irretrievable from the past. Following this vernacular art appeared everywhere – on the walls, vehicles, houses and on tombstones. In Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*, the survivor lawyer of 9/11 constructs a terrorized interior space, that turns out to be his landscape. In the weeks that followed September 11, 2001, the American writers were twisted in their imagination as even the thought of constructing a landscape disappeared. Fredric Jameson denounced the US media for orchestrating a “dissociation of sensibility” (297) through countless “unrealistic visuals” (297). Jean Baudrillard also accused the media of supervising the images of the event. Paul Auster in his later fictions changed the strategy of describing the American landscapes from the pedestrian and mapped spaces to the space of a new American man, full of fear, but not of dignity. Ethically and socially, I argue that 9/11 changed the human imagination of landscapes. The urban landscape becomes the spaces of inclusiveness and terror since 9/11.

Ever since the 9/11, all of us are on the throes of fear. This fear, I would say, is not the fear of the enemy, but the fear of multiple systems that obstruct our daily existence. After the brilliant fictions written by Mohsin Hamid, Don DeLillo and Paul Auster, we have the threat of the landscapes all over the globe, which might get destroyed by a variety of systems including the drones, airplanes and even by a virus of the pandemic. Where do the aborigines and adivasis go in this uneven world of ours? The visual song of the aborigines is well captured by the poet Haynes. The sense of embeddedness of the land is suggested here. The emotions are the results of inter-subjectivity. Embeddedness, connections and rootedness are the hallmarks of the aboriginal writers and they show their relationship with the landscape. If land is the beginning of the human genealogies, one never can get separated from it. In the age of Anthropocene, where man is the creator of nature and natural causes, the literary landscapes, needless to say, are better drawn by the aboriginal writers. John Barrel's idea of the landlords looking at the land and the inhabitants far disappearing is the cause and effect of the Anthropocene literature. The literature from the Global South traces the individuals, families and

ancestors in connection with the landscapes. Simon J Ortiz articulates this in many of his poetry collections. Ortiz's poems, which belong to the genre of *ethno-poiesis* invoke the need to retrace the lost steps in the landscapes. Where did our ancestral memories disappear is a question addressed in these poems. The Irish poet Eavan Boland in "Witness" writes:

What is a colony  
If not a brutal truth  
that when we speak  
the graves open  
And the dead walk? (Eavan)

In this powerful poem, the worn-down mountains imply a familiarity and fondness for the landscapes as the narrator has trodden the mountain paths many times in her life. While Boland's poem sets a pathetic tone of disappearances in the age of Anthropocene and landscapes, Linda Hogan in "The Sandhills" offers us another possibility of reconstructing landscapes with respect to the natural causes. She writes:

The language of cranes  
We once were told  
Is the wind. The wind  
is their method,  
their current, their translated story  
of life they write across the sky. (Hogan)

The traces here are the "ancestral longing." The wind is the translator and arguer. I remember Jayanta Mahapatra's poetry in this context. Mahapatra in his luminous verse defied the rules of writing poetry just by adoring nature. In some sense, he was following Derek Walcott's footsteps of nativism. Walcott's "Sea is History" is a classic example to be remembered here. Mahapatra in "The Captive Air of Chandipur-on-Sea" recontextualizes the desire of the natives with a twinge of alienation.

However vague the past may be, Mahapatra tries to articulate the desire of “recapturing” every inch of movement in the ocean.

The human actions, thus, reshape landscapes and literary imaginations in our time. The new genre of fiction called “calciferous fiction” addresses the terrible consequence of climate change and landscapes. Though in its puberty, this fiction has immense possibility of suggesting the coming up of a new age. Next to this is the issue of Geo-trauma. Geo trauma is inflicted by human actions. In fact, by human brutality. Everything in the land shrinks. The history of colonization and slavery has uprooted the lands of many; then how can we have a cogent idea of landscapes? The poem “The Bend in the River” by Bob Crank begins with an observer looking at the glacial river. The woman is a glacial woman, who occupies the glacial time, which is far different from ours. The poem highlights the human and the non-human, the disappearance of all and many and the serious erosions and other questions, the river faces. As we know, the river banks were the primary sites of human civilization. This can be seen in the river’s movements and the different cultures that thrived on the banks of Tapti, Ganga, Yamuna, Nile and even Godavari. If one looks at the cultures of landscapes, one never can separate the rivers that flowed close to many landscapes. One remembers here how the early modernity in America changed the course of lives as exemplified in the poetry of Hart Crane. Anthropocene and global cultures have the potential to change the landscapes in their own ways. Survival instincts are the basic questions. Stephen Baxter’s novel *Evolution* has further accentuated this point by giving us the speculative ideas of the change of the landscapes. Baxter’s collection reminds us of a dark dystopia of landscapes, far ahead than the terror, fear and dread associated with them. The plot becomes a site and the land becomes a national plan of bureaucratization. Nature transforms the wilderness. The Australian poet, John Kinsella has tried to look at this question by seriously changing the contours of the landscapes with colonization. Kinsella’s poem “Idyllatry” brings into focus the pastoral ridden by the unassuming forces of colonization – “a tractor’s roar underscores/ heavy going ground” (45). Can the aboriginal community be safe in their landscapes is the biggest challenge in our time. Wu Ming Yi’s Taiwanese novel *The Man with the Compound Eyes*

has descriptions of unstable and mobile trash island, to be precise the Pacific garbage vortex. The artificial landmasses of the congealed plastic and the other non-biodegradable waste serve the image of the nomadic itinerary. It must be remembered here that associated with the literary landscapes, there is a big history and culture of the nomads. Similar concerns are voiced by the American novelist Rick Bass in *The Hermit's Story*, where we have the issues of Ann, who disturbingly tells the narrative of difficulty as the nature turns out to be too calamitous for Gray Owl and a set of other inhabitants. The gleaming ribs of Ann's buried dogs symbolize the pathetic side of the post-industrial landscape, where one is forced to adjust with super calamities and modalities of survival.

The recent scholarship on waterscape has immensely helped many writers across the world to give attention to the changing parameters of the landscape in relation to water. If at all a next world war occurs, one should not be in any illusion that it would be based on the idea of sharing water between the continents and some countries. Asif Aslam Farukkhi's dystopic story "Stealing the Sea" (originally published with the title "Samandar ki Chor") offers us a powerful picture of the dread of those who live in the coastal belt as their ocean disappears one day. Where the ocean disappeared, a "huge crater" (17) appears, which systematically affects the lives of the milkman, peddlers, street vendors and a few others. E. Swyngedouw elaborates this idea further to foreground that the fluidity of water is more than everything that affects the landscape and hence water is not just something that is constantly in flux, but the greatest constituent of land and lives that perpetually moves through "physical geographies, but also cultural, social and symbolic landscapes" (77). Landscapes, it must be noted, change their contours with respect to the ways in which water overpower the space, which ultimately becomes a concern with everyone in the global time. The global catastrophe related to the waterscape is a deepening threat to landscapes all over the planet.

I would like to conclude this lecture by glancing at some of the serious apprehensions I have been keeping in mind for some time. We have seen how landscapes in the evolutionary history of human beings and in the literary history of this planet have been transforming, translating and playing the role of inclusion and exclusion of the humans and other inhabitants. The wide array of literatures



in the Global South – particularly from India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan have been marking the landscapes in our turbulent times. We live in an age of fanaticism, technological control, surveillance and other horrific conditions. While the blanket of fear upon us is too hazy to get removed, we are into an age of AI (Artificial Intelligence) wherein the machine, which is infused with the same passions and movements control the labour of the humans. Artificial intelligence operates with algorithms and a sarsen of spurious data. You have a set of equipment and the target here. Artificial Intelligence will produce grids of intelligibility related to affect and super control. In this age of artificial intelligence, when the robot walks on the landscape or rather enters the landscape, will it have the power to reorient the glory of what we had seen in the golden days of the human landscapes? How will a robot converse with a shepherd like Comus of John Milton? How can a robotic intelligent human talk to a woodpecker, a cow or to a rabbit? What would be the ontological status of the AI interventions in the landscapes and how would that appear in literatures?

Apart from the above questions I raised the real challenge before us: would AI create landscapes of its own? If so, how can a writer, thinker and philosopher inhabit such landscapes? The META, which is already there in our WhatsApp and Facebook, has already tracked all our movements. The ChatGPT, which is another form of information is ready to produce a landscape needed in its own way. Regarding the AI images, Melanie Mitchell argues, “It’s hard not to be dazzled, but may be a bit stunned, that a machine can take in images in the form of raw pixels and produce such accurate captions” (270). The towering landscapes in our time, created and re-created, are going to change their parameters. AI invades the landscape of literary imagination. The time has come that our writers need to be aware of the machine colonization of human mind. AI can never recreate the landscape in its physicality, but it can reconstruct something for our satisfaction, or for its own satisfaction. Where would our birds flow? Where would our hyenas, tigers and antelopes disappear? Into which skies do the birds fly? If the Mephistopheles entered into a contract with Dr. Faustus, in the age of AI our literary landscapes would be places of terrible inhabitations. We are at the fringe of an emotional collapse. From the barren strings of making ourselves rise, would we step

into another imagination when our poetry, novels and plays be written by the AI? Only time will answer this. Till then, we are into the layers of imagination of mutual coexistence, turbulence and romance of our landscapes – both physical as well as those provided by literatures all over the globe.

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## Keynote Address

### Nature and Creative Art: A Trajectory from Mythic-Adulation to Anthropocene-Apprehension

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**Abstract:** Despite an ambivalent stance on the inherent nature of reality lying either in the idea or in the phenomena, creative artists since antiquity have revered nature/earth as the essence--the kernel, of human thought and the source of literary creativity. They have attributed the evocation of literary impulse, like P. B. Shelley, to the coalescence of thought with “universe of things”. Creative writers consider that knowledge, creativity and literary sensibility irrefutably seek a dwelling place—*oikos*—in nature. However, a massive shift has taken place from mythical period to the present Anthropocene era in the ways of envisioning nature and nature-human relationship, treating and representing it. Revered as the divine embodiment in the Vedic period and the creation of God in the Christian origin myth, nature has been allegorically, symbolically and pragmatically represented as a site of beauty, danger, aesthetic and emotive evocation, scientific observation and exploration, anthropocentric consumerist exploitation to a domain largely generating a discourse of peril and doom. This presentation surveys literatures from the Vedic times to the Anthropocene era, observes how nature has been represented in literature over the times, analyses and reflects upon the motives of such delineation. Upon deeper reflection, I conclude that human tendencies and inclinations can be discerned towards revering, knowing, fearing and saving nature since the mythic period to the Anthropocene era. Reflecting upon human activities “to conquer, domesticate and violate” which have caused detrimental impact on the ecosystem of the earth as a result of scientific optimism and anthropocentric arrogance, creative artists of the present Anthropocene era not only lament the loss caused by nature’s exploitation and show the apocalyptic fear, but also indicate the urgency of responding with immediacy to the socio-cultural, political, religious, ethical questions of human responsibility toward nature.

**Keywords:** Environment, Biocentric, Anthropocentric, Anthropocene, Scientific Optimism, Ecosystem, Apocalypse

I am humbled by your invitation to the 25<sup>th</sup> MELOW International conference and am delighted to learn that this two-day conference has brought together scholars to share their scholarship on and around the central theme of the conference “Echoes of the Earth: Interplay of Literature and Landscape.” Primarily, I appreciate your selection of this small hilly town of Dhulikhel amid these green hills, aurally just a few miles away from the Himalayas which have conjured the human minds with awe, wonder, curiosity and veneration, and awakened thinkers, philosophers and sages to a contemplative state of transcendence—a realm of divine joy and bliss. Your physical—not merely voyeuristic I trust— proximity to this landscape will give a testimony of what landscape means to literary creativity.

My presentation will sporadically reflect over literatures of the West from the mythical and classical period to the present times, anecdotal reference to Vedas and Upanishads, Sanskrit literature by Kalidasa and Nepali literature to reflect upon human nature relationship, human attitudes to nature, with the ensuing impacts, as reflected in those writings and on writerly positions in literary creations. The presentation is, however, a humble initiation to stimulate curiosity and evoke response to the burgeoning issue of environment we as humans are confronting with.

Loosely shaped around the theme of “Nature and Creative Art,” my presentation will reflect on the interplay of nature (landscape) and creative art (literature). I am using nature, earth, landscape, environment, ecology indiscriminately to refer to the physical reality surpassing the biotic and abiotic world holistically. I apologize for reversing the order of “literature and landscape” in the conference title to “landscape (nature) and literature (creative art)” with an assertion that knowledge is embodied in nature. To reflect upon nature-literature (creative art) interplay, I will contemplate over the rendition of nature in literatures from the mythical period to the current Anthropocene era.

Creation myths prevalent in various religious beliefs and cultures associate ideas and knowledge with objective reality, the world of phenomena, perceived by senses and treat ideas set aside from objective reality as dreamy and unreal. Hindu belief system holds the earth as the source of knowledge. Beginning with *Aum agnimile purohitam yagyasya deva mrityujam. Hotaram ratnadhatamam* (ॐ अग्निमीले पुरोहितं यज्ञस्य देव मृत्युजम् होतरं रत्नधातमम्), the *Rigveda* exhibits the faith of the Aryans in the Indus valley on *agni* (fire), *vayu* (wind), *varun* (water), *surya* (sun), *soma* (moon), the world of phenomena, indicative of the reverence shown to natural elements and the the anthropocosmic (Panikkar 36) --divine, human and cosmic, power attributed to them. It is where nature, divine and human unitive vision can be seen in Hindu belief system. Creative art gains the contemplative force from this unity.

The contemplative/meditative moment marks the end of discursive stage from where the path leads to joy and ecstasy. Creative Art begins at this contemplative stage, and what ensues is the divine realization in tranquility (Salvation) and creative instinct in a repose. Contemplative journeys both for soteriological or creative goals have their roots in the earth as it is the essence of all things. Highlighting the earth as the essence of all things and beings, *Chandogya Upanisad* positions; यसां भूतानाम पृथ्वी रसः, पृथिव्या आपो रसः, आपां औषधयो रसः, ओषधीनाम् पुरुषो रसः, पुरुषस्य वाग रसः, वाच राग राशः, रचः साम रसः, सामना उद्गीता रसः (The essence of the beings/non-beings is the earth; the essence of earth is water; the essence of water is plants; the essence of plants is a person; the essence of a person is speech; the essence of speech is Rk (hymn); the essence of Rk is the *saman* (chant). The essence of the *saman* (chant) is *Udgitha*. (337-338), the contemplative (soteriological for saints) stage one reaches through chanting and singing.

The earth is the principal element to carve this trajectory. This significance ascribed to the earth/nature by the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* indicates how nature is represented in the Indian sub-continent. A deep ecological awareness and human-nature connectivity can be seen in the culture of the Indic regions. The worldviews projected by the *Bhagvadgita* can be regarded as to be venerating the ecological bond between men, animals and lower beings: The sages with true knowledge

विद्या विनय सम्पन्ने ब्राह्मणे गवि हस्तिनी

शुनि चैव श्वाके च पण्डिता समदर्शिनः (Karma-yoga 5:18)

The sages with true knowledge see with equal vision a learned Brahmana, a cow, an elephant, a dog and an outcaste (a dog-eater). Negating any hierarchical distinction between divine and mundane world (organic, inorganic and the divine world), the *Bhagavadgita* places everything on a horizontal plane in the way Barry Commoner's first law of ecology delineates "Everything Is Connected to Everything Else" (33).

The material pre-eminence of the world can be noticed in the Christian belief system as well. *The Bible* describes in "Genesis" how God hovering over the waters and the surfaces of the deep created out of the formless empty and void, the heavens and the earth, the light and the darkness, water and sky, seas and the land, trees and vegetations, day and night, the moon and stars to govern the night, the sun to govern the day, the creatures of the sea and water and animals and birds on the land before finally making man in His image, in His likeness as to rule over the land and over all the creatures. After creating man and woman, He blessed them and said "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Genesis 1: 28).

In Christian faith, God is believed to have created water, made land suitable for plant growth before making man from the dust of the ground, giving him life and creating woman from his ribs. God implanted trees in the garden and put in the middle of the garden of Eden "the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of Good and evil" (Genesis 2:8). It is only after Eve ate the apple and gave it to Adam to eat that they acquired the knowledge of good and evil. This process of creation in Christianity assumes the earth and the heaven as the base of all realities and the fertile ground for all understanding of light—knowledge—and life.

Many other indigenous cultures and religions attach importance to the awareness of the land. Native Americans, for example, conceive in the mythopoeic mode "a world in which plants, animals, pictures, words, actions, as well as humans, storms and the sunlight had the potential of power and

life” (Vecsey and Venebales 16). They trust primitive animism--a belief regarding the environment as living. A world can stand for a thing and a man in animal skin can be the animal. The animistic association with nature credits the idea that the entire consciousness comes from nature. In *Black Elk Speaks*, John G. Neihardt gathers, from what Black Elk expresses, ‘Native American religion is after all about seeing things in spirit and spirit in all things.’ Black Elk narrates his experience while standing on the highest mountain and seeing round beneath him the whole hoop of the world with a spirit in all thing, a tree giving shelter to everyone and encompassing everything.

And while I stood there, I saw more than I can tell and I understand more than I saw; for I was seeing in a sacred manner the shapes of all things in the spirit, and the shape of all shapes as they must live together like one being. And I saw that the sacred hoop of my people was one of many hoops that made one circle, wide as daylight and as starlight, and in the center grew one mighty flowering tree to shelter all the children of one mother and one father. And I say it was holy. (43)

A mighty flowering tree sheltering all the children of one mother and father indicates how nature is considered holy and divine and how it dwells in the heart of Native American religious consciousness. This association with nature marks their awareness and that the very beginning of “thinking” starts from the landscape imaginary.

### **Divine, Human and Nature Interaction in Classical Literature**

Nature’s dominant presence can be noticed in literature as a symbol, an image, a point of reference, as a power leading to deeper contemplative and emotive expression in the classical literature. Beside this mimetic, rhetorical and creative referentiality, it has been projected as a mystical and supernatural site of knowledge revered as divine, eulogized as gorgeous, charming and beautiful, shunned as foul and filthy, feared as dark, dangerous and ferocious since antiquity.

Classical literature of the Indian sub-continent deifies nature, assigns it supernatural position and internalizes the economy of nature with an emphasis on biocentric unity where divine, human and material (physical) assort as one and the same. This biocentric attitude to nature seen in the Indic



thought system means a lot to respond to the escalating ecoterrorism and environmental degradation causing a threat to the planet, earth, and the species on it.

The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, the classical epics of mythic dimension, which have now become an inherent part of public knowledge, nature/landscape is of utmost importance. The entire narrative of the epic *Mahabharata* that is a reflection on the way of life, on human society, righteousness, individual humility, devotion, right and wrong action, individual's peculiarities are narratives shaped around place of place sacred and divine and dark and ferocious representing good and bad facets of human life and the world.

In the classical Sanskrit literature, Kalidasa's portrayal of Sage Kanva's hermitage in *Abhijnanshakuntalam*, as a site of purity, beauty, sacredness and evocative power, has rare parallels in world literature. *Meghduta (The Cloud Messenger)* is Kalidasa's another popular poetic work symbolically presenting the connections between human emotion and landscape/environment. It narrates the story of Yaksha (a demigod), who is exiled due to the curse of Kubera in Ramgiri of Central India and is separated from his beloved during the rainy season. He sends a message through the cloud to his beloved living in Alakapuri in the Himalayas. The cloud, personified and endowed with human consciousness, echoes Yaksha's longing and love. The landscape imagery: rivers, forests, mountains, villages and cities on the way that Yaksha describes in the first part is vividly intricate. *Meghaduta* is an exemplary poem that gives nature life, connects with human and the divine, through its symbolic, contemplative expressivity.

In Greek and Roman classical literature, humanity's relationship to the world is seen through the forces of nature. Deities and divine power are animated and personified in nature. The Greek poet Theocritus in his pastoral mode of literary expression presents the bucolic vision of nature. Nature stands as a source of beauty and inspiration, chaos and destruction, rage, fate and death.

Homer's *Iliad* portrays the landscape shared by gods, humans, living and non-living with God on elevated spaces like Mount Olympus and others below. Nature's association with dangers and wonders, mysterious and supernatural has been shown in *The Odyssey*, when Odysseus is heading to

Ithaca crossing the unpredictable and endless sea. The sea has been presented as calm and navigable, violent and destructive like the storm. Islands can be beautiful; wilderness dangerous. The rugged island of Cyclopes, the dreamy island of the Lotus-Eaters, the bucolic and beautiful island of Calypso have links with human fate and destiny. Homeric writing links human emotions, struggles, conditions and fate to the powerful and uncontrollable force of nature. It remains a dominant presence in his writing.

The Greek playwrights--Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, use nature in their plays not only as a background, but as the symbolic indicator of divine will and power, human fate, moral dilemma, decay and suffering. In Aeschylus' plays, nature reflects the divine order and comic justice. Natural forces appear in the form of the expression of God's will whereas Sophocles' plays focus on human experience of nature regarding their actions, difficulties, dilemma and suffering. Nature reflects divine justice in Aeschylus and human fate in Sophocles.

In Aeschylus's *Pometheus Bound*, Prometheus, the protagonist is chained to a remote cliff in the barren, wild and inhospitable mountain for his eternal punishment in desolation for his defiance of God. Nature is projected as a boundary between order/civilization and chaos working at the divine will. In *Agamemnon*, one of the trilogies of *The Oresteia*, nature reflects human emotions, moral decay and divine will through profuse references of storms and natural disasters symbolizing familial and political storms in the house of Atreus. In *The Persians*, the uncontrollable force of nature, the power of God and fate, is shown in the form of the sea that swallows the Persian fleet causing its catastrophic end in the Battle of Salamis. Divine will, nature's power, human fate and suffering are major things symbolically hinted through the reference of nature in Aeschylus' plays.

Sophocles' plays *Oedipus Rex*, *Antigone*, *Oedipus at Colonus* reveal through symbolic and metaphoric use of nature: death, decay, moral pollution, human guilt, fate, conflict between human and divine law, divine intervention and nature's fury, individual dilemma and suffering.

Virgil's *Aeneid* uses nature symbolism to depict divine wrath, emotional turmoil and internal psychological struggles by referring to violent weather conditions, safety and hospitality through the

depiction of fertile, green and attractive landscapes similar to that of Carthage, (Dido), danger and divine threat through the description of the entrance of the underworld, divine interaction with nature to intervene human actions like Venus calming the sea to facilitate Aeneas' journey to Carthage.

Equally important is the role of nature in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in affecting and mirroring physical and emotional transformation. Change/transformation is the major theme and characters transform into mountains, rivers, trees and animals like the change of the nymph Daphne into a laurel tree, Narcissus's change into a flower after being self-obsessive on seeing his own image in a pool, the couple, Baucis and Philemon, into an intertwined tree. Nature remains the major force behind this change. The change of seasons following the abduction of Persephone by Hades reveals the cycle of life, death, revival and human experience in tune with nature. Nature is presented as idyllic, beautiful, emotive and dangerous at the same time. It won't be an exaggeration to say that Western classical literature envisions interaction, connection and organic unity between human, divine and natural world.

### **Nature and Literature from Medieval to the Neoclassical Period**

Medieval literature encompassing religious writings, sermons, homilies, chivalric romance, love poetry and allegorical literature alludes nature symbolically and allegorically. From a religious perspective, nature is projected as a medium of understanding divine order made in his image and bearing his grandeur, if not corrupted and polluted by sin. The landscape of Dante's *Divine Comedy* (*Inferno, Purgatorio and Paradiso*) is structured with religious and moral intent. Dante enters the dark wood in the beginning of *Inferno* and this dark wood symbolically stands for moral confusion, crisis and sinful life and the nine circles of Hell (limbo, lust, gluttony, greed, wrath, heresy, violence, fraud, treachery) comprising natural elements like earth, air, fire, water showing the intensity of sin and punishment. The portrayal of the landscape of the underworld in Dante is similar to Virgil's *Aeneid*.

As the Renaissance observed the revival of interest in classical antiquity, the literary writers used nature to depict human emotional conditions, idealized and peaceful pastoral life, love, light

with a reflection of divine order. Despite the shifting focus on humanity, Shakespeare's gardens, and forests in *King Lear*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *As you Like It* are vehicles of emotional and political appeals.

Edmund Spenser's *The Shepheardes Calendar* in its pastoral form depicts rural life, changing seasons and beauty of nature; Milton's *Paradise Lost* while describing human beings fall from grace symbolizes beauty and fragility of nature. From the restoration period till the 18<sup>th</sup> century, writers, rather than celebrating nature for its beauty, spiritual grandeur and source of inspiration, focused on its value, order, rational and empirical observation, study and utilization for human progress. Nature was taken more from a rationalist perspective and had a subdued position.

### **Return to Nature: Beauty and Sublimity, Vision and Imagination**

Creative artists have talked about the enormity of nature and its relation with knowledge, imagination, inspiration, and creativity. William Wordsworth's poem entitled "The Table Turned" reads:

One impulse of a vernal wood  
May teach you more of man,  
Of moral evil and of good  
Than all the sages can. (21-24:765)

This poetic exhortation proclaims that human expanse of knowledge and creativity tends to be diminutive in front of the vast array of earth that evokes reverence to its immensity, beauty and grandeur.

Romantic literature lightens rationalist's burden of reason, logic and ethics of the enlightenment era, takes humans from the stuffy, suffocating enclaves out to the sublime landscape to breath afresh in a contemplative mood. Nature is not only a reservoir of poetic images and symbols for Romantics, but the very source of human thought, knowledge and creativity. Shelley in "Mont Blanc" highlights the coalescence of thought with the universe of things evoking multifarious permutations of appearances ranging from gloomy to dark to bright to magnificent and writes:

The everlasting universe of things

Flows through the mind and rolls its rapid waves,

Now dark—now glittering—now reflecting gloom—

Now lending splendor, where from secret springs

The source of human thought its tribute brings. (Shelley “Mont Blanc”, 1-5))

Shelley holds, when worldly things in diverse forms and colors interact with the human mind, ideas, thought and knowledge get a reality. Creativity thus results from the intersection of nature and the human mind.

Romantic poets indeed envision harmonious relationship between humans and the world outside, creativity and landscape. Through extensive use of natural imagery, Wordsworth and Coleridge paint the natural world as a home, a birth place, a dwelling place of language, feeling, thought and expression. With some difference in the language use, both these poets present a great ecological vision. Coleridge in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” a poem written in defense of “all things both great and small”, the Mariner finally bids farewell to the wedding guest indicating the economy (harmony/unity) of nature:

He prayeth well, who loveth well

Both man and bird and beast (7:612-13)

Wordsworth uses green language, reveres nature as he feels that love of nature leads him to the love of humankind and that human physical and psychological living is impossible without earth. Wordsworth is a lover of the natural world—the world of eye and ear; he respects it as the nurse, the guide, the guardian of his heart, soul and of his moral being. He considers that nature has the power to fill our mind with emotions, intellectual charm, sublimity, calm delight and subtle joys by giving us the realization that nature is a powerful force that can bring unity in things:

Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows

Like harmony in music; there is a dark

Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles

Discordant images, makes them cling together

In a society. (Prelude 1:340-344)

Keats uses environmental imagery to express the bountifulness and power of nature to relieve humanity from weariness, fever, fret, disease, and death. In “Ode to a Nightingale”, he describes the how natural world is free from the worries of the human world:

Fade far away, dissolve and quite forget  
What thou among the leaves hast never known,  
the weariness, the fever, and the fret. (19-21)

For Romantic poets, nature is not only a background for imagery, source of creative knowledge, inspiration and imagination, a site evoking emotion, but a site of harmony, joy and respite from the problems of the mundane world.

Transatlantic writers (American Transcendentalists) Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman and environmental conservationist, John Muir reflect on the interconnections of the animal world with the organic and inorganic environment. For Emerson, knowledge is found not in books but in original relation to the universe. Least affected by the idea of ecocide/environmental degradation caused by human activities, he enhances the concept of immutability and vastness of nature in his book *Nature* and views: “Nature, in the common sense, refers to essences unchanged by man; space, the air, the river, the leaf” (356).

Walt Whitman holds great faith on the vastness of nature in “A Song of the Rolling Earth”. The earth gives him the confidence to overlook the ecological apocalyptic view because he believes that even the most destructive human actions are just the chipping. So, Whitman in “A Song of the Rolling Earth” proclaims knowledge to be an emulation of the spheres of the earth:

I swear there is no greatness or power that does not emulate  
those of the earth,  
There can be no theory of any account unless it corroborates the  
theory of the earth,  
No politics, song, religion, behavior, or what not is of account,

Unless it compare with the amplitude of the earth,  
Unless it face the exactness, vitality, impartiality, rectitude of the  
Earth. (91-95)

Whitman assertively assigns that there can be no knower and knowledge of the world that does not corroborate with the earth. Such an idea signals the primacy of earth and creative art/literature as a product of human mind thus invariably resonates the song of the earth. He indirectly says that ‘mental awareness has links with biology; and biology has not only links with, but is dependent on nature/earth (qtd. in Joshi 5). Whitman is influenced by *The Vedas*, which venerate nature and emphasize the importance of *Panchamahabuta*: sky (sound), wind (touch), fire (color), water (taste) and earth (smell) with their intersecting propensity (*panchikaran* process) that compose nature. His idea of symbiotic relationship of human and the natural world goes with Coleridge’s concept of organicity. Though he supports ecologists’ co-evolutionary model that regards the mutual adaptation of organism to their environment, his idea of connectedness (a problematic issue) has a slight anthropocentric inclination. Yet, his interest is not in material, but in spiritual and symbolic like the Vedic one.

Thoreau, “THE PATRON SAINT of American environmental writing” (Buell, *The Environmental* 115), is Emerson’s earthly opposite as he takes a more empirical and scientific approach, than the spiritual, to defining nature, though he finds both the spiritual and material significance. Nature, for him, has an intrinsic value than any utilitarian one. In this sense, literary art results from deeper understanding of the earth. Thoreau’s minute study of nature, the topography, plants, animals with a scientist’s accuracy in *Walden* is a testimony of “holistic ecological vision” (Buell, *The Environmental* 131).

Unlike Emerson’s and Thoreau’s non-fictional literary writings, Whitman as a democratic American poet and naturalist foregrounds the power of earth in “A Song of the Rolling Earth.” His deep ecological vision describes the earth with its all-embracing, all-compromising power and

amplitude of the earth, not bothered by the threat of ecocide, and ecological apocalyptic vision that many 19<sup>th</sup> century writers foresaw and warned.

American transcendentalists have, with their spiritual, scientific, biotic (deep ecological) or human inclinations in the depiction of nature, have great regard for nature. They mostly take the holistic approach of dealing with the earth and find it to be more powerful than any other worldly things and beings. Literature is all about knowing the landscape as language coevolves with it.

With unflinching love for and attachment to the land, John Muir considers nature as to be more mysterious than the supernatural form of God. Wilderness is a source of energy with prospects of spiritual and sensual delight; creative delight is merely a part of it.

### **Shifting Worldview on Nature and Culture in the Victorian Writings**

Nature has been symbolically depicted variously in the Victorian literature owing to shifting social, cultural and scientific tension. The age reflects partly the Romantic influence where nature is a site of sublime beauty and divine inspiration; partly the scientific influence of industrial advancement and conceptual change about the world views. The emergence of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution (*On the Origin of Species*) implanted the concept that the earth is not benign, bucolic and harmonious, but brutal and indifferent where all the species have to struggle for survival and only the fittest survive. Humans are for the first time made to rethink their origin that they are not the children of God, but of the apes from whom they have evolved from.

Lord Tennyson in his poems (*In Memoriam*) contradictorily presents nature's grandeur and indifference to the suffering of humanity; John Ruskin eulogizes nature for moral and spiritual betterment in his essays. If Charles Dicken's laments the loss of the vitality of rural life due to the degradation of nature with the emerging industrial towns (*Oliver Twist, Hard Times*) as does Matthew Arnold that of pastoral life in his poems, Thomas Hardy, in his pessimistic tone, portrays nature as cruel and indifferent, yet gives nature a prominent place in his Wessex novels. Victorian Gothic novels present nature as dark, dreary and mysterious, and realist novels present the landscape with greater accuracy. No matter whether Victorian poems and novels project nature as bucolic and



sublime, harsh and indifferent, dark and mysterious, filthy and dead, it has a dominant place in literary art.

### **Nature in Nepali Literature**

Nepal poets influenced by the Sanskrit and Western Romantic tradition have written poems using nature metaphor and references. This tradition begins with Lekhnath Poudyal's *Ritubichar* that describes the six seasons in the manner they were described by Kalidasa in his *Ritusamhar*. The poem exquisitely describes the features and traits of the season employing nature imageries, time and again allegorically. Seasons' truthful and realistic description with allegorical references, metrical and rhythmic particularity make this poem both easily accessible to the common readers and a bit remote at times. Yet, this poem sets a genre of Nepali nature writing:

हिलेमा भ्यागुतो बस्छ हिलेमा कमलस्थिति  
स्थानले मात्र के गर्नु भिन्नैछ गुणकोगति

Both the frog and the lotus flower are found in the mud, but are endowed with different traits Laxmi Prasad Devkota's poems reveal the development of natural awareness gained through the contact of the corporeal eye to the heightened understanding and knowledge gained through the visionary eye. He enters the world of mundane reality; in a state of imagination and vision, transcends it and enters the world of harmony and internalizes mercy, pity, peace and love—the characteristic emblems of world of eternity and truth. In a sublime state of mind in the proximity of nature, Devkota sees harmony between nature and humans. Devkota's poems like "The Rainbow", "Spring", "Song of the Nightingale", "The Swallow and Devkota", "The Rain", exhibit human nature coalescence. Season's description in "Spring" shows his minute observation:

What a Season has Arrived!  
Earth-rainbowing, hare-maddening,  
Bee-buzzing, bird-quickenings'  
Pulse palpitating, heart agitating! (1-4)

"The Swallow and Devkota" reveals human-nature harmony:

The swallow and Devkota

Share the same nest; share the same trait.

How the tiger and the lamb share the same riverbank!

Nature sits and weaves their hearts in a single thread. (1-5)

Poet Siddhicharan Shrestha's "Mero Pyaro Okhaldhung," and "Urbasi", Madhav Prasad Ghimire's "Kaligandaki" elegantly present the awareness of the place. So, does Ramesh Bikal's novel *Abiral Bagdachha Indravati*. In Nepali literary writings, nature's beauty, sublimity and its emotional power have been largely depicted. Over the time, climate change, deforestation, snow-melting in the Himalayas, flash floods, erosion, careless urbanization, ruthless treatment to nature, indigenous awareness have drawn contemporary literary writers, specially *pariyapoets* (poets writing on environment), toward ecopoetic expression of the discourse of doom, more in fictional and non-fictional forms than poetry. Nature is a dominant presence in Nepali literature.

### **Mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century Afterwards: Apprehension of Toxicity and Ecological Apocalypse**

With scientific advancement, industrialization, urbanization, use of pesticides on agricultural farms, growing population following advancement in health facilities, rise of consumer products and capitalist economy, rapid communication and transportation facilities, increasing use of fossil fuel, disposal of nuclear waste causing environmental pollution and threat, anxiety on the loss of nature is noticed in writings of the modern 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards. This anxiety is prompted by fragmentation of land, alienation faced by the people in their lives, anthropocentric hubris of human beings, "to conquer, humanize, domesticate, violate and exploit every natural thing" (Rueckert 113). With the increasing environmental problems causing severe threat to the earth, its flora and fauna and in turn to the human being themselves, literary writers have felt the urgency to focus on environmental crisis pushing the planet beyond limits.

Creative and critical voices (together with activism—like *chipko andolan* in India, tree huggers in the US) have come in profusion in favor of biocentric positioning against scientific optimism and anthropocentric arrogance to exploit the earth. Reflecting upon human activities having

detrimental impact on ecosystem, creative artists provoked by overall ecological threat, from the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present Anthropocene, not only lament the loss and show the apocalyptic fear caused by nature's exploitation, but also indicate the urgency of responding with immediacy to the socio-cultural, religious, political and ethical human responsibility toward nature. Landscape and literature have become more connected now. The canvas of expression has been broad. The shift is in the subject and theme. The dominant environmental concern is all about the fate of the planet and the human beings as reflected in Robert Frost's "A Brook in the City."

The meadows grass could be cemented down  
From growing under pavements of a town;  
The apple trees be sent to heath stone flame  
Is water wood to serve the brook the same?  
How else dispose of an immortal force  
No longer needed? Staunch it at its source  
With cinder loads dumped down? The brook was thrown  
Deep in a sewer dungeon under stone. (9-16)

Robinson Jeffers's poem "Passenger Pigeons", written before mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, ironically hints at this threat as well:

In spite of wars, famines and pestilences we are quite suddenly  
Three billion people: our bones, ours too would make  
Wide prairies white, a beautiful snow of unburied bones: (20-23)

Biocentric and anthropocentric discourses, deep and shallow ecological issues, ecocide and ecoterrorism, toxicity, utopia, dystopia and apocalypse, climate change and environmental pollution, bioregionalism and universalism, scientific optimism and its limits, environmental ethics, biophilia, responsibility, environments rights, duties, mediated and natural environment, knowing and ignoring earth and more entail areas of environmental literary response.

The questions like how does a poem represent nature? what images, symbols and figurations are there? what is the setting and background of a novel? what aesthetic appeal does nature make? which prominently foregrounded environmental literary writings are obsolete questions with limited resonance now?

There is a tendency of counter questioning them. The questions which prominently mark the ecopoetic discourse now are: How do the images, symbols and figurations used for nature affect it in turn? Can nature writing be taken as a genre? Can place/nature be a subject of critical analysis like race, class, caste, color, gender, ethnicity? Are writings of men and women on nature similar or different? If different why and how do they affect the destiny of nature? How do we perceive wild and urban, sublime and ugly, dark and bright spaces, forests and gardens in our memory? What role does education play in the perception of landscape? How is nature depicted in films, documentaries and advertisements, and how do they affect nature and society? What is the relation of environment and literature? What is the relation of environmental literature with environmental science, philosophy, history, ethics, psychology, arts, politics? What are the possibilities of scientific and social-scientific inquiry in this field. How is the experience related to place expressed in texts, theory, history and culture? How can the reference, use and imitation of physical environment be retheorized? How can the rhetoric of environmental discourse be studied? (Glotfelty and Buell)

I understand the complexity of our conversation in this conference, but I am hopeful that even the scrawny and sketchy indication of the immensity of nature will give us a feel on how human literary endeavors have been 'directed towards knowing, revering (as sacred), and fearing the immensity of nature by foregrounding its essence and intrinsic worth as the source of creativity (qtd in Joshi vi) since antiquity. With the modern techno-scientific progress, however, the exploitation of the earth has escalated beyond imagination as a result of anthropocentric consumerist demands of natural resources. Such acts of exhausting natural resources have intensified earth's pollution leading to environmentally adverse impacts (climate change, ice melting, deforestation, desertification of the Himalayas, sea-level rise, and what not) and, in turn, directed literary creative expression from

respecting sacred nature for symbolic portrayal and emotive evocation to pondering over economy (organic unity) to usefulness to threat of the end of nature (ecological apocalypse) to environmental ethics to protection/preservation discourses. Let me conclude with these lines from “An essay on Criticism” to indicate that much is written on nature and literature and much needs to be done:

The increasing prospects tires our wandering eyes,

Hills peep o'er hills, Alps on Alps Arise. (231-32)

A Little learning is a dangerous thing:

Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian Spring

Their shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,

And drinking largely sobers us again. (215-18)

Let us hope that the desire to write and learn more on landscape and nature will give us greater revelation on the immensity, essence and importance of human-nature harmony and coexistence.

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## Isaac Sequira Memorial Lecture Nature in Whitman: Whitman in Nature

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At one level, the title of the lecture points toward nature imagery, symbolism and metaphors as employed in Whitman's poetic universe; at another, it implies his creative consciousness as immersed, invested, and embedded in nature to an extent that it emerges as an internalised doctrine of his poetic creed. Both these levels co-exist as these are co-dependent as well as symbiotic in several ways. Right from the beginning of his poetic career, Whitman's engagement with nature had been intense as well as non-conventional. 'Intense' because of his bold endeavour to deal with nature in its unrestrained aspect having an "original" (26) energy-charge as evident in "Song of Myself," and 'non-conventional' as his first edition of *Leaves of Grass* which was published in 1855 demonstrates a poetic praxis markedly distinct from his contemporaries such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Emily Dickinson in America and also the English Romantics.

Nature for Whitman was not just a physical landscape, earth, water, air, and ether, but also a living spirit, a propulsion behind the universe, a cosmic rhythm, and the aspirational core of humanity signified by "One's-Self," singular as well as democratic in the sense of 'collective' "En-Masse" (Moon 3). In her book on *A Place for Humility: Whitman, Dickinson, and the Natural World* (2014), Christine Gerhardt distinguishes Whitman's "expansive" poetic "vision" (comprising earth, grass, sea, birds, etc.) resonating in terms of "America's democratic inclusiveness" from that of Dickinson whose "lyric meditations, natural phenomena constitute key metaphors for life and death, for a new religion, and for the power of the creative imagination" (1). Martin K. Doudna, however, observes that "Whitman sees natural facts as inherently symbolic of spiritual facts" *a la* Ralph Waldo Emerson whose essay on "Nature" (1844), and a poem namely "Song of Nature" published in his book titled *Poems* (1847) left a lasting imprint on Whitman's evolving poetic consciousness.

Whitman was extremely conscious of his poetic stance, which rather than having a lofty ambition was focussed on singing “of inherent qualities in man, indifferent whether right or wrong” in “Of My Poems” (592), and thus determining that issues concerning indecency and ethico-moral considerations would be dealt with candour and forthrightness. He states this in an unsigned review of his own poems in 1855 published in the *Brooklyn Daily Times*. Talking about the efficacy of his poems, Whitman writes that the effects that his poems have on readers are “no effects of artists or the arts, but effects of the original eye or arm, or the actual atmosphere, or tree, or bird. You may feel the unconscious teaching of a fine brute, but will never feel the artificial teaching of a fine writer or speaker” (793).

Whitman juxtaposes himself with those poets who portray “great events, personages, wars, loves, passions” and thereby positions himself as the poet who celebrates “natural propensities in himself” in a non-conclusive manner and “that is the way he celebrates all” (794). Without alluding to other poets/writers, he emerges as the one who cannot offer “others” but himself, “[o]f pure American breed, large and lusty” (794) through his poems—be that in the form of poetic content or style. Whitman’s fine, brute-like poetic demeanour corroborates his “barbaric yawp” in “Song of Myself” (77), which refuses to be tamed or translated. Interestingly, in Section 52, this fine brute’s yawp/ “gab” is complained against by a swooping, spotted hawk who also accuses him of his foot-loose, fancy-free “loitering;” nevertheless, he becomes one with the “air,” “the runaway sun” and “eddies” (794).

In *Democratic Vistas* (1871), Whitman writes about “variety and freedom” being “the greatest lessons of Nature through the universe” (757), and toward the end, envisions nature as a “complete, actual poem” that exists “calmly in the divine scheme containing all . . . careless of the criticism of a day, or these endless and wordy chatterers” (772). The nature is not ‘calm’ in the passive, static sense as he can feel the “pulsations in all matter, all spirit, throbbing forever” (772-73). Moreover, in *Specimen Days* (1882) containing notes and essays written at various points in his life, Whitman merges in Nature, which he realizes as “open, voiceless, mystic, far removed, yet palpable, [and]

eloquent” (780). Later he advocates that the “Sweet, sane, still Nakedness in Nature” needs to be experienced not just visually or cerebrally, but “through the whole corporeal body” (781).

Nature being the mainstay of his poetic praxis, Whitman engages with her in a variety of ways. For instance, while celebrating love or mystical union in Section 5 of “Song of Myself,” Whitman is out in the open inviting thus: “Loafe with me on the grass, loose the stop from your throat” to later recall an unusually “transparent summer morning” when he experiences love which is “kelson of the creation” followed by an instantaneous dawning of “peace and knowledge” (29) that is beyond all arguments. To quote from the text:

Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge  
that pass all the argument of the earth,  
And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own,  
And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own,  
And that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the  
women my sisters and lovers,  
And that a kelson of the creation is love,  
And limitless are leaves stiff or drooping in the fields,  
And brown ants in the little wells beneath them,  
And mossy scabs of the worm fence, heap'd stones, elder,  
mullein and poke-weed. (Whitman 30)

This newly dawned wisdom has God as his “promise” and “brother” along with women as lovers and sisters. The bond, in fact, emanates from love. However, that is not all as there are innumerable stiff/limp leaves scattered in the fields along with little insects like “brown ants” along with moss, stones, mullein, poke-weed, etc. inseparable from the expanded ambit of love that has enveloped him. Interestingly, Nature in her diverse manifestations surrounds him as love emerges as a great integrating and unifying force. Whitman also suggests that every aspect of creation howsoever trivial or miniscule, is equally crucial and hence cannot be ignored.

In the sixth section of “Song of Myself,” the central symbol is “grass.” Whitman makes a conjecture with conviction that it is the “flag of my disposition” or “the handkerchief of Lord.” Later, the grass ceases to be a literal referent and becomes a “uniform hieroglyphic” and thereby assumes the form of a “child” and a “babe of vegetation.” It also signifies the beautiful “uncut hair of graves” (30). Contemplating over “grass” further, Whitman experiences deathlessness when he writes: “The smallest sprout shows there is really no death, / And if ever there was it led forward life, and does not wait at the end to arrest it . . .” (31). Hence the “grass” becomes instrumental in making Whitman experience the prevalence of a subtle and deeper process in human life characterized by eternity. At the time of the realization of the fact of the endlessness of one’s life, man deems himself luckier to have died: “All goes onward and outward, nothing collapses, / And to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier” (31). Like “grass,” “leaves” too are suggestive of a diverse range of experiences such as love, sympathy, sex, pain, misery, compassion, detachment, carnality, ‘cosmicity,’ spirituality, ‘mysticality,’ emotionality, kindness, and empathy. Whitman’s poetic vision being inclusive, it recoils neither from the sacred nor the profane, neither from the subtle nor the gross. Another remarkable aspect of Whitman’s use of “leaves” as a symbol is its dynamic character. The ever-changing hues of his “leaves” have a powerful bearing on the contexts and milieus that these evoke. On the one hand, the “leaves” signify American democracy and its ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity, but on the other, they stand for Whitman’s pantheism, cosmic vision, and his belief in transcendentalism.

As such, *Leaves of Grass*, as it evolved over a period of thirty-seven years starting from 1855 when the first edition was published containing only twelve poems, until 1892 when it had grown both in size and stature as a “compendious final work” (Moon xxi), is loaded with symbolic implications and portrays a variety of landscapes, seascapes, and skyscapes along with varied mindscapes (or abstract ‘scapes’/spaces) representing the magnitude and infinitude of evolution at several levels such as psychological, spiritual, mystical, philosophical, and transcendental.

The first of the SEA-DRIFT poems, “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking” is rich in imagery. This poem traces the growth of a boy into man. The cradle symbolizes momentum as well as childhood. “Endless Rocking” signifies the growth of the child into a man and it also stands for various trials and tribulations that one has to undergo in life. The central image in the poem is that of the sea. It is also used in two other poems entitled “As I Ebb’d with the Ocean of Life” and “Starting from Paumanok.” In “Starting from Paumanok,” Whitman alludes to “Western Sea” and “Eastern Sea” which stand for the formative Western and Oriental influences on Whitman. As the waves sweep the shores of the sea; similarly, his verses are also drenched by the multifarious influences. In sincere acknowledgement, Whitman writes:

See, on the one side the Western Sea and on the other the  
Eastern Sea, how they advance and retreat upon my  
poems as upon their own shores. (24-25)

In fact, the sea is “the fierce old mother” in “As I Ebb’d with the Ocean of Life,” however, in “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking,” Whitman views sea as “some old crone rocking the cradle” (212). He portrays two birds who are “two feather’d guests from Alabama” and the subsequent death of the female bird baffles the keenly observant boy who keeps “cautiously peering” (207) and faces the cruel fact of death. He needs “the clew” (211) to resolve the mystery of death and the old crone (the sea) provides it while rocking the cradle. It signifies motherhood, birth, life and also deathlessness. Prior to this, the poet hears the sea clearly whispering about death, but it is rocking the cradle at the end, which signifies rebirth and regeneration. Thus, we may see how Whitman employs images of “the bird” and “the sea” to endow the boy with a mature understanding of life.

Norman Foerster views Whitman’s poetic trajectory from the perspective of his mystical experience of “surpassing peace and knowledge” in “Song of Myself” and how he lived the rest of his life under that spell obeying an “interior command” which would guide his path vis-à-vis representation and theorisation of nature and the notion of democracy. He further observes that Whitman remained “passionately devoted” to the land “surrounding his birth-place” (Foerster 2). His

interminable bond with Long Island was akin to that of Thoreau with Walden. His poetic canvas widens as he evolves as a poet, as a man with an extraordinary capacity to feel through experiencing—an aspect that Foerster underscores when he observes that the “primary importance of sensuousness in his life and in his poetry seems to me unquestionable. His senses were unusually powerful and delicate. Virtually all the influences that led to his mystical awakening were, as we have seen, sensuous” (13).

In the poem, “To the Sun-Set Breeze,” Whitman’s closeness to nature along with its experience, absorption and assimilation transmute his perception and deepen his feeling about elements such as earth, air, water and space with an unusual simultaneity:

I feel the sky, the prairies vast—I feel the mighty northern  
lakes,

I feel the ocean and the forest—somehow, I feel the globe itself  
swift-swimming in space. . . (458)

The element of fire too is evident at a symbolic level as it is signified by “central urge in every atom” in the poem “A Persian Lesson” (464). It is also represented, even though symbolically, in another poem, “I Sing the Body Electric,” through the “body electric” which has a sacred dimension as well: “If anything is sacred the human body is sacred” (Whitman 86-87). In fact, he realizes nature as an open space having endless “original energy” along with power to sooth, nourish, and elevate simultaneously:

It seems indeed as if peace and nutriment from heaven subtly filter into me as I slowly hobble down these country lanes and across fields, in the good air—as I sit here in solitude with Nature—open, voiceless, mystic, far removed, yet palpable, eloquent Nature. I merge myself in the scene, in the perfect day. Hovering over the clear brook-water, I am sooth’d by its soft gurgle in one place, and the hoarser murmurs of its three-foot fall in another. (Whitman, “Complete” 104)

Whitman's treatment of Nature as "elements" (458), that is, earth, air, water and space basically happen to be the central concern in different editions of *Leaves of Grass* including the 1891-92 edition, and it has been evidenced through his title-page epigraph in the form of a poem duly signed by the poet. By "[t]allying [e]arth's soil, trees, winds, tumultuous waves," Whitman invites his "Soul" (which he claims to be "one" with his "Body") to pen verses for his "Body" called "Walt Whitman" (2). Whereas the element of fire too is present (literally as well as metaphorically as discussed) in his prose and poetic writings, space too has been envisioned as infinite vastness delineated as the fifth important element of the "Self" that he sings in Section 51 of "Song of Myself"— "I am large, I contain multitudes" (77).

In Section 33, however, Whitman crafts a different spatio-temporal frame to accommodate his vastly illimitable vision wherein "Space and Time" have been realized through an expanded consciousness of the Self and the Body that break free of all shackles, "ties and ballasts" to be able to rest his elbows in "sea-gaps," "skirt sierras," and spread palms to "cover continents" (57). Being "afoot" with his vision, Whitman lends a richly varied and diverse sense of detail in this section to thereby underscore his comprehension and profound assimilation of nature as well as life as a whole. Whitman's 'at-one-ment' with nature becomes evident when he witnesses himself everywhere— along the dry ravines, in the rivers, savannas, forests, deserts, and in places where panthers, bucks, rattlesnakes, alligators and black bears are found. Beholding himself atop mountains, he treads along the pathway in the grass. Being omnipresent, the poet's presence is felt where cattle graze, the quail whistles, human heart pulsates with life, and the bat flies. He is also visible in the sea, under the Niagara Falls, in the fields, among animals and birds, in cemeteries, orchards, and prairies (54). He ventures through voyaging to every port (56) alongside visiting "orchards of spheres" (55) to look at "quintillions ripen'd and . . . quintillions green" (57). This racy cataloguing on the poet's part in no way implies his separation from what he beholds or experiences; it is rather *becoming* (emphasis mine) the object of his description, experience or observation: "I do not ask the wounded person how he feels, I myself / become the wounded person . . ." (58). His capacity to be at one with the sufferer,

makes Whitman a *Sahridaya*, which in Sanskrit aesthetics signifies someone who rather than feeling the pain of the other (Lakshmi), or sympathising with her/him, becomes the other. Whitman's cosmic vision also is akin to the notion of *Viraat* (Cosmic Form) also expounded as "Vision of Visions" (Yogananda 843) in the eleventh chapter of the *Gita* comprising every aspect of creation. In fact, Whitman's cosmic vision takes into account everything that is existent in the universe. Whitman's catalogue thus is infinite touching every aspect of creation including Nature such as the oceans, rivers, mountains, plains along with all the continents.

Thus, as discussed, Nature is germane to Whitman's poetic universe and contains five elements namely earth, air, water, ether/space, and fire also known as *panchbhoot* or *panchtatva* in Hinduism (Mani). Air, for instance, is an element that rejuvenates vital force creates "best persons," as Whitman writes: "Now I see the secret of the making of the best persons, / It is to grow in the open air and to eat and sleep with the earth" (129). In fact, he has passion "of growing outdoors" and hence, his preference for those who have tasted "oceans" and lived among the "woods" (36). Whitman is equally enamoured by the sky as well—be that the sky at twilight with its "haze" making him experience "nirwana" (447), or the one imagined as "heaven" into which the rain rises from the sea to eventually descend as "the Poem of the Earth" to "lave the drouths" along with "dust-layers of the globe" (444). As a matter of fact, each element of nature tends to converse in a deep, nuanced manner with the poet, who evolves as "the Answerer" answering queries including unanswerable ones as he now knows how "[e]very existence has its idiom and tongue" (142). Whitman's creative consciousness catalyses the abstract and the concrete, the material and the spiritual, the physical and the metaphysical culminating in a 'unitive' poetic vision.

The symbol of the sea is also a constant source of wonderment as well as realization of harsher realities of life for Whitman. In "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," the sea laves him all over with the "delicious word death" used five times in succession in the poem to underline its gravity (Whitman 211). Death being the firm fact of life, the poet has no business to stop as his voyage, his passage has to continue. And this is because a tender little sprout has endowed him with the realization



that “there is really no death” (31). Such metaphorical fusion and symbolic experimentation both challenge as well as cajole the reader to bid adieu to a conventional mode of exploring symbols of sea and nature in Whitman’s poetry. David Kuebrich’s observation seems pertinent at this juncture:

With the sea representing the divine or the spiritual in Whitman’s poetry, the land represents the natural world, and the shoreline becomes a meeting point between the two worlds and thus an appropriate location for spiritual perception and poetic inspiration. In various poems, for instance, “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking,” “By Blue Ontario's Shore,” “When I Heard at the Close of the Day,” and “As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life,” Whitman receives an important revelation at the seashore. (Kuebrich)

Thus, nature and sea are crucial as well as vital for Whitman’s poetic praxis. Nevertheless, it does not stop there and lucidly suggests that the wicked, loathsome, and rough in the earth is directly proportional to the wicked, loathsome, and rough in man. Therefore, we can observe subtle as well as solid symbiotic layers in the poet’s relationship with nature. Mountains, trees, fields and plants, creatures of earth, divisions of time, mornings, noons, afternoons, evenings and nights, along with the seasons of the year are veritable, animate, pulsating presences in Whitman’s poetic schema having profound bearing on his intrinsic being connected inextricably with a diverse range of extrinsic/manifest reality.

That is the reason why the loftiest of Whitman’s claims about nature-man relationship and his metaphysical as well as mystical experiences tend to stay rooted as well as grounded to an unimaginable degree. Killingsworth rightly corroborates this point thus:

But this metaphysical experience does not distract the senses away from the earth and the body; rather, it turns them toward the earth and the body's sensitive connection with it. The soul itself is linked to the earth; it is an environmental agent that overtakes the ordinary life of the inspired individual and makes everything strange and new.

Nevertheless, Whitman’s poetic idiom by and large becomes mystical as the numinous/divine and the ephemeral co-exist in a harmonious ‘unitiveness’ also perceived as ‘identity-in-

difference.’ He becomes contradictions incarnate and thereby evidences that these could synchronise, howsoever intricately. This aspect of Whitman’s poetry has been critiqued by Richard Volney Chase as well by terming it as “ruthless equalitarianism to conceive the All” (qtd. in Sharma 71). Despite the fact that Whitman has been questioned as a “consistent philosophical thinker,” Diane Kepner claims that “he is giving us a ‘theory of nature’ (or a philosophy of Being) which answers to the demands that Emerson made for such a theory in ‘Nature’” (1). Emerson, in fact, advocates a theory through “direct observation” rather than depending on tradition: “The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition . . . ?” (qtd. in Kepner 4).

Justin Kaplan also has a point when he writes that Emerson must have been “speaking to Whitman alone” while talking about the poet of America: “He is in the forest walks . . . he sits on the mosses of the mountain. . . When he lifts his great voice, men gather to him and forget all that is past. . . As he proceeds, I see their eyes sparkle . . .” (Kaplan 101). Emerson thus paves way, even though inadvertently, for Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*. Nevertheless, Whitman’s streak of defiance comes to the fore in his 1851 Art Union talk wherein he underscores the fact that “the highest art” had to be “the most totally engaged” (Kaplan 168). And that was the reason why “the great old masters,” culture, and tradition “appeared to him as repressive, barriers to self-transcendence, and the construction of ‘a poem on the open principles of nature’” (Kaplan 169).

Massud Farzan views the poem, “A Persian Lesson” as a suitable summation of the entire poetic universe of Whitman. The poet himself seems to be the “greybeard sufi” who technically shared the fruition of his Sufic wisdom towards the end of his poetic career in 1891. Farzan looks at this poem as a “fitting coda for *Leaves of Grass*, not only because it presents a synthesis and recapitulation of the rest of the book, but also because of the marvelous sense of tranquility and wholeness it conveys” (582). The sermon is being delivered “In the fresh scent of the morning in the open air, / On the slope of a teeming Persian rose-garden, / Under an ancient chestnut-tree wide

spreading its branches” (464) in the midst of nature underscoring that fact that divinity operates as an invisible principle signified by “central urge” in every atom of the manifest as well as the unmanifest world.

Summing up, we can say that Whitman’s poetic discourse on nature in relation to self and vice versa in the second half of the nineteenth century has a strong ecological and environmental aspect. It thus becomes extremely relevant in the crisis of contemporary context marked by issues such as abrogation of environment, ecological imbalance, global warming, hyper-materialism, hyper-consumerism, anthropocentrism, and utter disregard for indigenous ways of thinking and dealing with nature and the world around us. Christine Gerhardt rightly perceives Whitman’s poetic praxis as “resonant with the development of a modern environmental consciousness in the history of American environmental literature.” She further underscores his contribution to the poetic idiom that “brings nature as autonomous subject matter” (Gerhardt). Whitman’s deep nature-centred aesthetic engagement helps him decode and depict most complex contours of nature as well as of his own self. Therefore, if we theorise landscape as a space or sphere, there is a whole variety of landscapes (including seascapes and skyscapes) in Whitman’s poetic universe that coalesce with physical, philosophical, psycho-sexual, spiritual and mystical landscapes (in the sense of mindscapes), amply exemplifying nature as the core of his creative consciousness, and also the poet as profoundly merged and at one with nature.

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## When the Whole Earth is Ground Zero

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**Abstract:** Among the many binaries familiar to the human world – from the pastoral to the postmodern times—the country vs the city gained prominence since the beginning of the industrial age, often considered as the start of the Anthropocene, with the city becoming not just the opposite of natural landscape, but took on a larger cultural significance and an economic marker of human development. Ecocriticism, a late theoretical entrant at a time when other postmodern theories like Deconstruction, Postcolonialism, New Historicism and the likes were on the wane, acknowledged its disciplinary limitations and stressed upon a new sense of urgency beyond gender, race, class, identity and all such divisive human-made borders. Put simply, it stressed on raising awareness on a global scale about the precarious condition the Earth—the only inhabitable human space in this universe as of now – has been pushed into due to rampant material needs and greed. And since ecocriticism arose, broadly speaking, out of literary-critical studies, it felt that literature (and other arts), one of the most ancient markers of culture, might also be turned into effective and emotive dialogues of critical redressal due to the irreversible damage human activities have triggered putting into peril their own survival. The proposed paper will attempt theoretically to deal with these issues by punctuating ideas with literary examples.

**Keywords:** Ground Zero, The Anthropocene, Country vs City, Ecocriticism

Ground Zero has two meanings: the negative one refers to the point on the earth's surface directly above or below an exploding nuclear bomb. The nuclear capability of human beings is often considered the stronger point of reference for the beginning of the Anthropocene, the other being the start of the industrial age—although, Geologists disagree about the onset of this epoch. Noam Chomsky has the following opinion on the event of the dropping of the Hiroshima bomb: “[I]t was

apparent that the genie was out of the bottle and that technological development would soon reach that stage—as they did in 1953, with the explosion of thermonuclear weapons. That led to the setting of the Doomsday Clock by the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* at two minutes to midnight—meaning global termination” (2).

The other, the more hopeful meaning refers to Ground Zero being a starting point or base for an activity, usually one of redemption or redressal. Now, the data for the impact of such redressal is not convincing; rather it is the opposite—for example, the heatwave experienced in the month of May 2024 in India has been recorded to be 1.5 degrees Celsius warmer than the last measured heatwave data available.<sup>[11]</sup> Whereas, debates on issues of counter-steps against global warming are as yet inconclusive. Rather, the reality is, that every time a natural disaster strikes, the event itself is treated as a starting point for a short-term urgency to gather data which is often very likely forgotten till the next calamitous happening. This became evident in India in the wake of the recent devastating landslides in the Wayanad district of Kerala state (known to depend very strongly on tourism revenue) on the 30<sup>th</sup> of July 2024. The Kerala High Court had to initiate a *suo moto* proceeding asking the state government to document a study on the inherent geological characteristic of the affected landscape, its bio-diversity, natural resources and allied aspects to factor in what kind of developmental activities could be ecologically sustained.<sup>[12]</sup> Dave Petley, a global expert on the study and management of landslides has come up with a detailed report on the 6<sup>th</sup> August 2024 with satellite images of the affected sites sourced from ISRO and Google Earth before and after the disaster.<sup>[13]</sup> The debatable and uncertain issues arising here is, would such data be sufficient for a proper ecological and human redressal to the calamity, or, would the race for development again change the very nature of the problem to make it occur again as a new disaster? Similarly, there are several websites with data on the plastic pollution in our oceans<sup>[14]</sup> with how many million tons of plastic dumped into the oceans every year, breaking it up into daily dumping data, percentage of plastic in overall marine debris, what amount of micro-plastics enter our bodies through food, and what it does to our bodies etc.; with probable statistics of how much from this dumping can be dredged and used for landfills, what

percentage can be recycled, what incinerated and so on; yet, most of the counter-measures read like theoretical discourses as of now. But, since it is common sense to predict that if 71% of earth's surface is covered by oceans that are beyond the political boundaries, the entire earth ought to be considered as Ground Zero for any redemptive measures, in actuality though, environmental issues are fraught with such divides like the North-South, or the developing vs the developed nations. The El Niño crisis for example which is a measure of above-average sea/ocean surface temperatures with polar glaciers sliding into oceans at an alarming rate since the 1990s is going to eventually affect all countries but at the moment only the smaller island nations like the Maldives seem to be at the receiving end of this climatic situation. Yet, that the present environmental realities are of prime importance at the policy level of countries can be seen by a recent article in the editorial section of the *Times of India* where, advising Nirmala Sitharaman, the Finance Minister of Narendra Modi led government for the third term, the chief economist of Credit Rating Information Services of India Limited (CRISIL), Dharmakirti Joshi puts his primary suggestion<sup>[5]</sup> as:

The ongoing heatwave is a grim reminder that climate risks are real and present. A study by Council on Energy, Environment and Water shows that monsoon patterns are changing. Inclement weather has been largely responsible for persistently high food inflation. This has been holding banks from cutting rates. So, increasing budgetary allocation and frontloading spending are important, as is improving early warning systems, developing weather-resistant crops, improving storage and food processing to curb wastages. (10)

This observation is also a reminder how issues of environment—besides impacting a basic human necessity, food (and calling for the implementation of the latest in crop technology like genetically modifying crops to become weather-resistant)—are deeply linked with a nation's economy.

Still remaining on our key concept Ground Zero vis-à-vis the Earth, it becomes apparent that we cannot restrict this term to merely within our known spatial parameters, albeit, this would now include the entire landscape (and waterscape) of the Earth which technology has probably measured and geo-tagged down to the last square foot. If in the real sense space has to be measured, astronomers



are already grappling with distances in light years <sup>[6]</sup> in an attempt to understand how our universe was formed, and how mapping this knowledge can be utterly mortifying. In a recent interview with *Times Evoke*<sup>[7]</sup>, astronomer Kevin Hainline who specializes in studying the earliest formed galaxies after the Big Bang emphasized how humans ought to drop their egotistic baggage about being the best species on Earth by observing:

We humans tend to think we come into existence when we are born. We imagine we possess our cells and atoms—but we are just borrowing these, from the food we eat, the air we breathe. These atoms are ours for the tiniest moment. If we trace the energy that goes into our thinking, our heart beating, our blood pumping, you’ll see this has always existed. Eventually, the atoms in your fingertips and brain, the carbon in your body, go into the centre of stars. Astronomy is very humbling—it teaches us that we are the product of so many things happening in the universe. Looking back at these galaxies<sup>[8]</sup> helps us learn how the universe began to put life together; starting with the earliest stars, with complex materials which formed other stars and eventually—in one galaxy, around one planet—we formed. All these things had to happen and go right for us to be here—this teaches us life is incredibly precious. We humans don’t treasure life in the way we should or see it as this magnificent product of 14 billion years of things happening. We tend to look at trees, plants and other animals and think, ‘We can do what we want with them because we’re better than them’—but they are just different expressions of the same idea in the universe, which is putting all life together, atom by atom. (13)

Besides getting an idea of how humans suffer from narcissism and myopia, the immensity of space and time can be gleaned from this observation that almost blends science and spirituality: it informs us how vast and infinitely complex the cosmos is, and, in contrast, how insignificant is the human presence and human agency. And, as regards the human concept of ‘real estate’ always being *terra firma*, it is again illuminating to know that most of the mass of not just planets but galaxies is made up of what is termed as ‘dark matter’ and corresponding ‘dark energy’ is the mysterious driving force for the continuous expansion of the universe.<sup>[9]</sup> Further, as a humble reminder to our discussion about

the earth as Ground Zero within these few sentences till now, we have already touched upon the disciplines of crop science, economics, hydrography, climatology and astrophysics which in turn is a further reminder of the cross-disciplinary nature of the discipline of Environmental Studies, and commensurately, the necessity for coming together of various disciplines of knowledge for sustainable human life on earth. For that to happen, the prerequisite is a coming together of the concerned thinkers from various societies all around the world. As Fred Dallmayr in his *Dialogue Among Civilizations: Its Meaning and Purpose* observed:

As we learn today with growing insistence, civilizational “progress”—if unchecked—can lead and will lead to the steady subjugation and ultimate spoliation or destruction of our natural habitat. Hence, we are faced today with an urgent ecological problem—a problem crystallized in the question: is civilizational or technological progress “sustainable” in the long run? Differently phrased how can human civilization be sustained in the face of looming ecological disaster?<sup>[10]</sup>

Yet, although the maxim: ‘Study Nature, Not Books’ is known since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, this multidisciplinary branch of knowledge called Environmental Studies was slow to enter into the academia, and was not visible in any higher educational institution in the world before the mid-twentieth century.<sup>[11]</sup> Within literary-critical studies, Ecocriticism as a discipline emerged in the early 1990s with the establishment of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE, pronounced ‘Az-lee’) in 1992 in America with the specific purpose of “sharing of facts, ideas and texts concerning the study of literature and the environment.”<sup>[12]</sup> As it is true that theory follows praxis, Ecocriticism actually reminds us that before the formulation of a critical-discursive discourse on ‘literature and the environment’, literature has been responding to the environment, as well as the irreversible changes human activities have been flinging upon it. As an example from the Indian knowledge systems, the *Shantih Path Mantra* in the *Yajurveda* can be considered as an example of one of the earliest ponderings on the health of this earth and all the beings in it.<sup>[13]</sup> On the other hand, M.H. Abrams, tracing the literary representation of natural environment in the West mentions that

these are “as old as recorded literature” citing the emergence of the Pastoral form with Theocritus in Greece in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, carried over during the Roman empire by Virgil, and then with the mention of the Garden of Eden in the Hebrew Bible (98). He notes the gradual shift in perception of the concept of wilderness from the Puritan view of it as a dark and ominous thing, possibly the abode of demons, which needs to be overcome, appropriated, and cultivated by human beings, to the view expressed by Thoreau two centuries later that ‘in wilderness is the preservation of the world’ (100). It is common knowledge now that Thoreau’s spot by the Walden Pond was merely two miles away from the nearest town, Concord, which in a way is restating the fact that real wilderness would gradually start disappearing from the late nineteenth century, or, what is more true in our own century that wilderness is ‘conserved’ within human habitats, or, wild areas and forests have become ‘reserved’ areas from which human activities like grazing, lumbering and hunting are banned by law. But much before industrialization, poets brought into sharp juxtaposition human civilizational spaces (towns and cities) with Nature through the pastoral. Besides Abrams, Greg Garrard in his book *Ecocriticism* devotes an entire chapter to the pastoral opining that “No other trope is so deeply entrenched in Western culture, or so deeply problematic for environmentalism. With its roots in the classical period, pastoral has shown itself to be infinitely malleable for differing political ends, and potentially harmful in its tensions and evasions” (33). For example, reading “The Passionate Shepherd to His Love,” the famous pre-industrial pastoral by Christopher Marlowe, one is hardly in any doubt that the confident speaker of the poem betrays the fact that his community—besides domesticating sheep and cattle for their produce—freely indulges in mining the surrounding “Valleys, groves, hills, and fields, / Woods, or steepy mountain” for their yields.<sup>[14]</sup> And, from the Renaissance to the Romantic periods, pastoral poetry steadily reminded readers of the vanishing clans and their rustic lands as Wordsworth’s famous pastoral poem “Michael” narrated. As about the predominant change in the landscape, that of the expanding cities like London, both Wordsworth and his senior contemporary William Blake would write poems—Blake’s “London” chronicles class and gender exploitation, and Wordsworth’s “Composed Upon Westminster Bridge” becomes a rare poem in

praise of the city, albeit captured in the early morning before the sky above got enveloped in smoke from the factory chimneys. A little later, Byron's poem "Darkness" almost anticipates the apocalyptic strain becoming prevalent in so many works of literature since the mid-twentieth century building up an entire sub-genre of dystopic writing that texts like *1984* and *Silent Spring* ushered in. City-life started gaining focus with the turn of the twentieth century with the accompanying portrayal of a mechanized human life, a sense of urban desolation, alienation and ennui captured so well in the modern poems like that of Thomas Hardy's "Nobody Comes," Ezra Pound's "In A Station of the Metro," Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." The American modern poets like William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens as well as the post-Eliot generation of British poets like Auden and Larkin were predominantly engaged in representing the psychological, existential and the quotidian human lives in the cities. Besides, the two world wars and the increasing postmodern consciousness to technically better poetic craft beyond the Moderns hardly left any scope for poetry to look beyond the human world towards the natural environment and ecology<sup>[15]</sup> and write what came to be known only from as late as the 1990s as Eco-poetry. It focused on the relationship between human beings and the non-human world in such a way that it is both about the environment—a larger presence and reality than human existence on earth—and is environmentalist, i.e., prioritizing this environment, although most humans actually tend to believe that it is themselves and their plight that is prior. A few other expectations from eco-poetry are that the underlying strong environmentalist message in the poems must also hint at an awareness to resolve the environmental crises, and indicate mechanisms of healing not just within the human societies full of schisms, but also between the human and the non-human world. And yet, an eco-poem must also be a poem, its diction qualifies as 'poetic' and not just lines strung up with 'nature' terms.<sup>[16]</sup> Eco-poetry, as defined by Craig Santos Perez in his article "Teaching Eco-poetry in a Time of Climate Change" refers to "poetry about ecology, ecosystems, environmental injustice, animals, agriculture, climate change, water, and even food. It emerged in the 1990s as poets questioned the naturalness of 'nature poetry,' especially since nature itself was rapidly changing due to global warming and environmental destruction."<sup>[17]</sup>

This brings us to the real problem which is a kind of a paradox: all art, in order to qualify as ‘art’ has an element of the figurative, whereas nature and its problems constitute the real. Thus, we are in the Heideggerian dilemma about the inability of accessing a thing in itself, especially through the agency of language. In fact, Robert Haas, the Pulitzer and the National Book award-winning author, as well as a former Poet Laureate of the United States, while writing a new introduction to Gary Snyder’s famous book of essays on the nature-culture interface titled *The Practice of the Wild* opines somewhat similarly when he says that “our language for the dynamism of the ecosystems has been impoverished (x)”. Put in another way, only nature, in itself, is ecocentric, whereas art becomes, by default, anthropocentric. However, some ways to overcome this problem has been suggested by Richard Kerridge in his essay “Environmentalism and Ecocriticism” (2006) where he enlists the emphasis by several ecocritics to move away from postmodernist critical theory “that has become so caught up in analyses of language that the physical world, if not denied outright, is ignored” (531). Kerridge also, citing Jonathan Bate, supports the demand for a literal reading of literature, whereby “Wordsworth’s owls and Keats’ swallows should be read, first and foremost, as real owls and swallows. To read them otherwise is now the evasive reading” (532). But much before Kerridge, Jean-Paul Sartre, in his prescient essay “Why Write” published just after World War II with the knowledge that human beings now possessed the atomic button for self-destruction, reminded us of an ethical dimension to the whole anthropocentric enterprise about thinking, writing and reading when he said:

With each of our acts, the world reveals to us a new face. But, if we know that we are directors of being, we also know that we are not its producers. If we turn away from this landscape, it will sink back into its dark permanence. At least, it will sink back; there is no one mad enough to think that it is going to be annihilated. It is we who shall be annihilated, and the earth will remain in its lethargy until another consciousness comes along to awaken it. (Lodge 371)

This brings us to the final question about how, if at all, can literature contribute to environmental well-being which in turn would contribute to human sustenance on this earth. And, the allied issue of

identifying acclaimed writers who are environmentalists too. It has already been discussed that literature has been a conscience-keeper through its records of all kinds of applaudable and forgettable human activities, including those towards ecology and environment much before the onset of the Anthropocene. It has also been mentioned that Ecocriticism is aware of its limitations towards environmental redressal and needs to work in tandem with other disciplines of knowledge, especially with technology to think of ways to slow down at first and then to gradually reverse the already massive damage inflicted upon this earth. But the environmental crises have reached such levels that mere reflection, contemplation and raising awareness would not do—it requires activism; and ours (i.e., for students of literary-critical studies) would be, as a first step, to include Ecocriticism as a compulsory course in the syllabus. Actually, very few writers come to mind who are acknowledged and awarded for their creative writing, including devoting entire anthologies or texts to issues on the environment and ecology, and, as well, renowned for their eco-activism. From India, Amitav Ghosh qualifies as a strong contender for eco-literature, but is not an eco-activist. Vandana Shiva is a well-known eco-feminist, but doesn't shape her activism into creative writing to the extent that Mahasweta Devi did. The historian and environmentalist Ramachandra Guha's *The Unquiet Woods* is an exemplary text that connects his academic-intellectual work with activism.<sup>[18]</sup> But above all, the critically acclaimed Pulitzer Prize-winning and National Book award-nominated American poet and an equally committed environmentalist Gary Snyder merits to be named first. Snyder (b.1930) grew up in his parents' farm in Washington State and while doing his higher education did his summer jobs with the U.S. Forest Service and the National Park Service. He chanced upon writing poetry in the mid-1950s quite accidentally, as he confesses: "I began to meditate nights, after work, and I found myself writing some poems that surprised me" (Snyder, 1992:391). Robert Haas captures the American poetic scenario of that time:

The most striking voices in North American poetry in the 1950s and early '60s—post-Hiroshima, post-Auschwitz (what W.H. Auden called "the age of anxiety")—wrote a poetry of psychological crisis: the ferocious poems of Sylvia Plath, the struggles of Robert Lowell and

Theodore Roethke with bipolar disorder and of John Berryman with alcoholism and depression, and Allen Ginsberg's hyperbolic address to a generation "destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked." There was a slight shock turning from that work to Snyder's evocation of the sheer energy of the living world. (Snyder, 2020: XXI)

The 'sheer energy of the living world' would be realistically recorded in Snyder's many poems, always encountered by the domineering energy of human agency (be it religion, or the government—versions of the Church and the State since the olden times) as when he writes in the poem "The Call of the Wild" featured in his Pulitzer Prize-winning anthology *Turtle Island*:

The heavy old man in his bed at night  
Hears the Coyote singing  
in the back meadow.  
All the years he ranched and mined and logged.  
A Catholic.  
A native Californian.  
and the Coyotes howl in his  
Eightieth year.  
He will call the Government  
Trapper  
Who uses iron leg-traps on Coyotes,  
Tomorrow.  
My sons will lose this  
Music they have just started  
To love. (Snyder 1992: 220)

Incidentally, this eighty year old rancher, miner and logger in this poem can be juxtaposed with the eighty year old Michael in Wordsworth's pastoral poem of the same name to arrive at a graph of the incremental rise in human colonization of Nature and, since the twentieth century, the rapid

elimination of flora and fauna.<sup>[19]</sup> Another important divergence between Wordsworth and Snyder is that the former urged people to learn from Nature<sup>[20]</sup> whereas Snyder, considered as the foremost eco-poet alive writing in English today<sup>[21]</sup>, remains skeptical, and even ironical about this aspect while redrawing the scope of both human and non-human nature as he does in his brief preface to his 1992 anthology, *No Nature*:

Nature also means the physical universe, including the urban, industrial and toxic. But we do not easily *know* nature, or even know ourselves. Whatever it actually is, it will not fulfil our conceptions or assumptions. It will dodge our expectations and theoretical models. There is no single or set “nature” either as “the natural world” or “the nature of things.” The greatest respect we can pay to nature is not to trap it, but to acknowledge that it eludes us and that our own nature is also fluid, open, and conditional. (Preface)

Right from the Renaissance however, the human tendency has been to trap nature. It is in this sense that Ecocriticism is a discourse which is post-Postcolonial, not just literally that it comes after Postcolonialism has had its day with its appalling history of slavery (including women confined as sex slaves), indentured labour, and other forms of tortures on the colonized human beings, but because it ought to be seen—considering the whole Earth as ‘ground zero’—as the despoliation and territorialization of the entire earth, making Pramod Nayar describe this reality with the coinage of a portmanteau word ‘toxicorography’ in his recently published book *Vulnerable Earth: The Literature of Climate Crisis*. Thus, the hopeful meaning of ‘ground zero’ rests on practice and prayers. The practice rests—as suggested by Snyder in his collection of essays *The Practice of the Wild* about necessary and conscious activism for environmentalist virtue and political keenness to prioritize the quality of living of all beings and natural resources on earth over the quantitative accumulation of materials by humans alone eliminating the non-human in the process. And the prayer can be Snyder’s poem “Prayer for the Great Family” that he borrows from an old Mohawk prayer, and interestingly echoes our own *Shanti Path Mantra*:

Gratitude to Mother Earth, sailing through night and day—



and to her soil: rich, rare, and sweet

*in our minds so be it.*

Gratitude to Plants, the sun-facing light-changing leaf

and fine root-hairs; standing still through wind

and rain; their dance is in the flowing spiral grain

*in our minds so be it.*

Gratitude to Air, bearing and soaring Swift and the silent

Owl at dawn. Breath of our song

clear spirit breeze

*in our minds so be it.*

Gratitude to Wild Beings, our brothers and sisters, teaching

secrets, freedoms, and ways; who share with us their

milk; self-complete, brave, and aware

*in our minds so be it.*

Gratitude to Water: clouds, lakes, rivers, glaciers;

holding or releasing; streaming through all

our bodies salty seas

*in our minds so be it.*

Gratitude to the Sun: blinding pulsing light through

trunks of trees, through mists, warming caves where

bears and snakes sleep—he who wakes us—

*in our minds so be it.*

Gratitude to the Great Sky

who holds billions of stars—and goes yet beyond that—

beyond all powers, and thoughts

and yet is within us—

Grandfather Space.

The Mind is his Wife.

*so be it.* (1992: 223)

Ecopoetry and Ecocriticism might thus be a stark reminder that our advancing knowledge of territorial mapping, AI-generated climate prediction, geo-tagging and satellite imagery might just become technology too little too late hurtling us towards a zero-sum game.

### Notes

<sup>[1]</sup> *Business Insider* article, June 7 2024; [www.businessinsider.in](http://www.businessinsider.in).

<sup>[2]</sup> Giti Pratap's report dated 8 August, 2024 on the website <https://www.barandbench.com> accessed on 9 August 2024.

<sup>[3]</sup> Petley's report is on the site, <https://www.eos.org> accessed here on 9 August 2024.

<sup>[4]</sup> Sites like [sas.org.uk](http://sas.org.uk) and [news.un.org](http://news.un.org) among others.

<sup>[5]</sup> *The Times of India* (Ahmedabad Edition), June 11, 2024.

<sup>[6]</sup> One light year is about 6 trillion miles or 9 trillion kilometres.

<sup>[7]</sup> *The Times of India* (Ahmedabad Edition), June 12, 2024.

<sup>[8]</sup> Hainline is credited with being the first person to spot one of the earliest galaxies recorded so far with the help of the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST), one that formed just 290 million years after the Big Bang. By contrast our life on earth began 4 billion years after.

<sup>[9]</sup> <https://cfa.harvard.edu> accessed on 17 June, 2024. Since knowledge in this area is still developing and is at present hypothetical, hence the prefix 'dark' given by astro-physicists.

<sup>[10]</sup> In a talk he delivered at the Balvant Parekh Centre for General Semantics & Other Human Sciences, Baroda on 21 May 2009 subsequently published by the Centre as a monograph.

<sup>[11]</sup> The New York State College of Forestry at Syracuse University is often considered as the first to establish a BS in environmental studies degree in 1952, awarding its first degree in 1956. (Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ Environmental\\_studies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Environmental_studies); accessed on 10 June, 2024.)

<sup>[12]</sup> <https://www.asle.org> accessed on 17 June, 2024.

<sup>[13]</sup> *aum dayuh shantih...prithvih shantih, aapah shantih, vanaspatayah shantih...* connects humans with all other beings and entities in Nature in reciprocal peace and harmony. ‘May peace radiate in the whole sky as well as the whole ethereal space everywhere. May peace reign all over the earth, in water and in all herbs, trees and creepers.’

<sup>[14]</sup> The quoted lines are from the first stanza of the poem that by the fourth becomes even more evident of the exploitation of Nature by the Shepherd community: “A gown made of the finest wool / Which from our pretty Lambs we pull; / Fur lined slippers for the cold, / With buckles of the purest gold.”

<sup>[15]</sup> One exception would be Ted Hughes; yet he is a *postmodern* Nature poet, meaning that his natural world is not so much *for* nature as it was a conscious rebellion against the Moderns and their metropolitan culture as was his conscious shaping of his Yorkshire dialect into poetry as a deliberate movement away from the city-bred erudite Modern diction, his use of animals and birds as tropes, like his “Thought-Fox” becoming symbolic of poetic inspiration, and his crow series of poems metaphoric of the anti-God.

<sup>[16]</sup> In an earlier essay, I identified Elizabeth Browning’s 1862 poem “A Musical Instrument” as an example of an ecopoem. See my article entitled “Ecological Awareness in (English) Poetry: A Working Paper” in the text *Interpretations of Literature: Theory and Practice* (2020) edited by Prashant Sinha and Prabhanjan Mane, Aadi Publications, Jaipur.

<sup>[17]</sup> <https://thegeorgiareview.com/posts/teaching-ecopoetry-in-a-time-of-climate-change/> (accessed on 15 September, 2024).

<sup>[18]</sup> In the preface to the anniversary edition of *The Unquiet Woods*, Guha remembers another academic from Kumaun University, Uttarakhand, Shekhar Pathak, who was an equally fierce activist

and edited the ‘outstanding journal’ on Himalayan ecology, *Pahar* (which in English means ‘mountain’).

<sup>[19]</sup> Registering data on birds alone, the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History mentions that over 40 species of birds have become extinct since the beginning of the nineteenth century. The list of other creatures is much larger.

<sup>[20]</sup> As in “The Tables Turned” Wordsworth exhorted his readers ‘Let Nature be your teacher.’

<sup>[21]</sup> Mary Oliver (1935-2019) comes closest to Gary Snyder as a Nature poet. But she’s more introspective bordering on the metaphysical (e.g., her poem “Summer Day”) recollecting in tranquillity instead of a more direct poetic and personal (activist) response like Snyder’s.

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## **Dunnett's Case Study of Arthur C. Clarke, Applied to John of Patmos: The Interplay of Literature and Landscape on Imagined Futures**

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**Abstract:** In this paper I argue that two authors, John of Patmos, and Arthur C. Clarke are interesting case studies that exemplify the interplay of literature and landscape on imagined futures. Arthur C. Clarke and John of Patmos, who were considered as Prophets of their age, exhibited, in their texts, a connection to outer space trauma in an imagined geopolitical cosmic future. Oliver Dunnett's case study of Arthur C. Clarke provides a structure for addressing geopolitical cultures of outer space that demonstrate the importance of the geographical imagination in human futures (Dunnett 770). In examining Clarke's selected life and works, Dunnett structures his analysis in three areas: "imperialism, technology and tropicality" (770). This method and framework are useful as an interface for my own case study on John of Patmos. I engage in the same concerns but in the time of Roman imperialism. I will then apply Clarke's third law, "any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic" (21), to compare John's portents of the future, and his visions, as the practice of magic and astrology (McHugh 168) to Clarke's aspirations for the future. Although John's Island was in the Mediterranean, for the purpose of this study I consider the interesting aspects of tropicality that Dunnett's approach brings to my analysis, exchanging tropicality for a more general island geography. In these authors are the echoes of the Earth through the environment of "place, culture and politics" (Dunnett 770) providing the creative space to engage in the imaginary.

**Keywords:** Outer space, Apocalypse, Islands, Landscape, Imperialism, Clarke, John of Patmos

### **Introduction**

Landscapes play significant roles in human preoccupations with real and imaginary journeys that extend to outer space. Furthermore, the delicate dramas and human traumas that were once considered

as worldly, or Earth-written, analysed through the field of psychoanalysis (Kingsbury 489) are set to be played out on a cosmic stage. Two authors Arthur C. Clarke and John of Patmos had a cosmic vision, of a “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1 NSRV) that provide fascinating case studies in the current turn to outer space as a human and social future. Separated by historical time and from different fields of knowledge their visions of a cosmic future are in fact drawn from geographical sites of trauma. In these two authors are the echoes of the Earth in the interplay of literature and landscape.

Drawing on the work of J. Theodore Bent who compares the text of the Book of Revelation with the geography of the island of Patmos, and its surrounding oceans, islands, and distant landscapes, reveals the extent of John’s imaginary of Earth traumas tied to a landscape in his geographical imagination. Hugh C. Prince, Derek Gregory, Dennis Cosgrove, Steve Pile, and Stephen Daniels provide the theories, methods, explanations, and trajectories for the geographical imagination. Furthermore, the Apollo astronaut photographs involve whole Earth images and the human as eyewitness (Cosgrove “Contested” 270) that are a consummation of John’s vision for the future. John’s text records an outer space or heaven for human activity. This paper considers that environments provided these authors with the creative space to engage in neocolonial imaginaries that explore an outer space future.

### **Writing Trauma: Geography and the Stars**

The fascinating account by J. Theodore Bent, who visited the island of Patmos, compares the literary text of the Book of Revelation to the surrounding environment and landscape (813). Bent’s observations are vital in providing evidence for John’s “geographical imagination” (Prince et.al). Also evidenced in his writings are John McHugh’s claims that his text demonstrates his use of the stars. Therefore, an analysis of the Book of Revelation demonstrates John’s literary interplay with the landscape, and stellar cartography, as inspiration for his creativity while a prisoner on the Island of Patmos. The relevance of this approach is to consider the theory of the influence of a physical geography, a geographical imaginary, and a “geographical imagination” (Pile et.al.) as influences on

John's text. In the same vein as Arthur C. Clarke, island geography was a space for portents of the future of humankind. Moreover, Sigmund Freud argued that human beings are attuned to an "astronomical geography" (77), simply through their sleep cycles. Freud's term is useful when considering John's writings on Patmos tying together the relationship of landscape with John's use of the stellar systems. McHugh argues that John's writings in the Book of Revelation show evidence of Sargon's cosmic geography (Horowitz 5, 93), and "Mesopotamian star figures" appropriated and retold in Revelation 12 (167).

McHugh gives striking evidence for the use of Mesopotamian star charts in The Book of Revelation, chapter 12: 1-6, demonstrating their equivalence. Comparing the two writings he notes the inclusion in both of a Pregnant-woman (Pregnancy-goddess), Red-Dragon (Hydra), and the Child (Regulus), therefore, John's vision "corresponds exactly with the constellations and stars catalogued in Mesopotamian star atlases" (185). These are significant interplays with John's text. Robert Poole claims that Arthur C. Clarke, moved between fact and fiction (257), and the author of the Book of Revelation likewise has a similar approach to his cosmic vision of the future. John and Clarke are considered as Prophets of their age. John lived in an ancient time of Roman imperialism and is known as a Christian Prophet that writes of an apocalyptic future. Arthur C. Clarke was considered "the West's leading techno-Prophet" (Poole 255) in his visions for an outer space future. John was a prisoner on the Island of Patmos, whereas Clarke chose an imperial geography, the island of Ceylon that had been a British colony. Clarke's theories involve the necessity of a geostationary orbit that was offered by the isle of Ceylon/Sri Lanka for his visions for outer space technologies. From John's place of island geography, he created a veiled literary response as a script and as a guide for Christians living about 69 ACE. The landscape and the situation of Patmos were inspirations for his writings (Bent 813). The performance of the stars in their cosmic journeys across the heaven above him, were a map of future Earthly upheaval. Outer space became a new location for Messianic geopolitical performance.

John of Patmos, in ancient times, wrote The Book of Revelation as a response to his imprisonment by imperial Rome. In his island geography, place and space, landscape and nature became significant catalysts for a geographical imagination in his religious sensitivities (Prince 22; Gregory et. al. Dictionary 282). His writings provided a vision of a radicalised reconstitution of imperial power, the city, geography, and the religious conduct of life on Earth. This intersected with outer space. It is perhaps a strange approach to link his aspirations for Christians with outer space, but I will argue that it is relevant, evidenced in his writings, and displays the many influences and fields of knowledge that he incorporated into his texts.

### **The Geographical Imagination**

Oliver Dunnett's analysis in *Imperialism, Technology and Tropicality in Arthur C. Clarke's Geopolitics of Outer Space*, demonstrates the geographical imagination has relevance in Clarke's creative and scientific work, like John on the Island of Patmos, this provides a valuable interface for assessing impacts of "imperialism, technology" (770), and island geography. Examining the Book of Revelation through the lens of Dunnett's tripartite structural analysis supports a method to explore John of Patmos and ascertain how environments of "place, culture and politics" (Dunnett 770) influenced his imperial thinking.

Hugh C. Prince argues that the geographical imagination gives rise to blatant fictions by writers (24). Although he maintains that "observations of reality remain the basis for geographical inquiry" (23), he cautions, through analogy, that abstract painting is a theoretical technique that is an indirect approach to the representation of reality. He argues that we read geography using observation told at the hand of the discoverer, calling into action sympathetic insight and imaginative understanding that is a creative art (22). Gregory claims the geographical imagination is a phenomenon possessing human sensitivities towards the significance of place and space (*Dictionary* 282).

John's visions, in the Book of Revelation, are sensitivities to both cosmic and geographical space. His whole Earth descriptions of the return of the Messiah are reminiscent of the views seen by



astronauts from space. Cosgrove claims that the turn to outer space in the Apollo missions brought new spaces for engagement. He recognised that outer space imagery, centred particularly in the Earthrise photograph, “was altering the shape of the contemporary geographical imagination” (Cosgrove “Contested” 271). John’s geographical imagination was drawn from the landscape in a vision of the world to be transformed. Stephen Daniels explains that the concept of the geographical imagination as a phenomenon that is: “the bigger picture of imagination...encompassing the condition of both the known world and the horizons of possible worlds...” (183). John’s prophetic writings encompass these two types of imagination, the island itself as the known world and the worlds of his imagination.

### **Comparison of Clarke and John**

For these prophetic writers, place is central to an understanding of their world on the verge of changes in civilisation and human destiny (Poole 255). Dunnett reveals that for Clarke “the place of Ceylon/Sri Lanka became central to his understandings of space exploration, science and society” (771). For John the island of Patmos was central to an understanding of an unfolding “cosmic drama” (Koester 1) explored through portents and the imaginary overturning of Roman occupation through violent cataclysms and the return of Christ. His writings deconstruct imperial society that engaged in Greco-Roman festivals so that he could provide readers with a sense of a Christian future (Koester 5). In *Profiles of the Future: An Inquiry into the Limits of the Possible*, Clarke engages with the role of prophecy in his own writing and for the futurist. He provides evidence that prognostication (portents) in science is sometimes dismissed as magic, then argues that “the hazards of prophecy [are just a] failure of the imagination” (12, 19). What is clear is that for these authors prophecies of the future, environments, and their geographical imaginations are tied to their versions of outer space futures in interesting ways.

Dunnett claims that the way Clarke experienced island life influenced the production of his representational texts (775). The same claim can be made for John on the island of Patmos. Bent claims that “St. John must have been an eye-witness of some volcanic eruption” (814). John therefore

describes what he sees occurring in the landscape, the images of destruction, and transposes these events onto a future catastrophe.

### **Imperialism**

Arthur C. Clarke and John of Patmos were considered as writers of prophecy in a particular geopolitical world formed by imperialism. Clarke, like John, believed that outer space would involve a one-world political geography that would result in a peaceful planet (Clarke 198). But these technical manifestations are just the continuations of the imperial project “the United States of Earth” (Clarke 199). Tariq Jazeel considers that the inception of a colonial Ceylon has an imperial island-imagination established by the British: “the production and articulation of an idea, or an imaginative geography” (400). Like the British, Clarke considered that Ceylon had strategic value for his imagined outer space future.

Clarke’s vision of the future is tied to this geographical imagination that is one of imperialism. This is a western hegemony as a model that absorbs all cultures and local knowledges. This colonial drive for conquest and more territory turned to engagements with outer space as a new frontier. Ancient Rome embodied the same drives for conquest and John as prisoner on the island of Patmos turned to literature to explore his creative imagination in the space and place of imperial repression.

John is situated on what we can consider as the other side of imperialism. A prisoner by command of the emperor. But John’s cosmic vision, and geographical imagination, is in fact another type of imperialistic view of the world. The return of Christ is not simply to renew all creation, it will superimpose a new civilisation on an existing world. The city of Babylon or the Roman empire is destroyed, and the New Jerusalem arrives fully formed as a centre of power and authority (Rev. 21:10-14 NSRV). Moreover, Denis Cosgrove in *Apollo’s Eye: A Cartographic Genealogy of the Earth in the Western Imagination*, claims that the writings of John in the Book of Revelation “crystallizes Christian concerns with origins and ends and with the liminal characters located at the edges of time and space...differ[ing] from Roman imperialism’s demarcated limes” (Cosgrove “Apollo’s” 59). John offers no demarcated limes, no designated territory, the whole Earth is conquered. John’s

imaginary moves from the boundaries of terrestrial occupied lands to celestial spaces beyond the control of the Roman empire.

John's writing of his visions should be considered as "a supernatural attempt to overthrow the power of the Roman empire" (Haywood 314). This is manifested by his prophecy that demonstrates that the Heavenly beings of John's court are more powerful than the Roman Emperor. Whereas the Romans transformed part of the world through Earthly contests, the Messiah would transform the world from the heavens. In John's writings, Earth is terraformed to Edenic wholeness, and the purposeful destruction of Roman civilisation is replaced by the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2 NSRV). The process of destruction prefaces the new civilisation that will overwrite the existing one, not unlike the images produced by science fiction and their extra-terrestrials, he is invited to "look" and view a profile of the future (Rev. 4:1 NSRV). John sees a cosmic future and an outer space dominated and occupied by extra-terrestrial beings. In John's description, a supernatural being sits on a throne surrounded by monstrous creatures. Familiar Earth animals are reconstituted in unnatural combinations of their body parts, including one with a human face. This cosmic space is also inhabited by a Priestly class of men in white robes that serve then bow before a throne. Jesus, or the Lamb, is the only one worthy to perform the commands from the scroll as a script that returns him to the Earth: a planned reinsertion like the trajectories of astronauts (Rev. 4-6 NSRV).

John's visions fall within the realm of fantasy kingdoms, science fiction narratives, that can draw on the apocalyptic genre and his text. He uses his writing as a theological weapon against imperial power (Haywood 311-312). John sees an apocalyptic future of geographical and cosmic upheaval of earthquakes, the sun and moon darkened, and the stars falling to Earth (Rev. 6: 12-14 NSRV). But Craig G. Koester suggests that "Revelation's critical view of Roman dominion cannot be adequately understood as a response to a heightened threat of imperial violence against the church" (7). This suggests that the threat that John perceived was more imaginary, arising from his geography, the geographical imagination, and subjective experience.

According to Koester, The Book of Revelation, has a specific purpose for the time in which it was written and the people for whom it was supposedly written, Christians. Koester states “The book’s visions seek to alter the way they see the political, religious, and economic dimensions of imperial life...” (5). Altered seeing would also be an important aspect of Clarke’s life as his writings imagine a future of an outer space occupied by humanity, spacecrafts, and satellite technology.

### **Technology and Magic Visions of the Future**

Clarke’s interests were in both science and science fiction. This combination of the practical application of his imaginary was essential in his work on radar technologies during the second world war (Dunnett 771). In an interesting crossover with visions and prophecy, radar can see objects while far off and plot their position. Clarke also preconceived satellite technology that would beam visions back to Earth and allow for improvement in communications.

When reading John’s text there are technological aspects to his religious aspirations that links astronomical observations with human futures in outer space. His narrative includes a vast array of outer space experiences: a heavenly court where voices proclaim support for God’s directing the destiny of life on Earth (Rev. 4:8; 5: 9 NSRV), a Messianic mission to transform life on Earth (Rev. 5: 5 NSRV), and a full-formed city that descends through the atmosphere (Rev. 21: 10 NSRV). These geographical imaginations are similar constructions of outer space in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, a writing collaboration between Stanley Kubrick and Clarke. In the film the voice of gods at the watering hole is heard in the primitive court of man-apes that directs human destiny. The transcendence of both the man-ape “Moonwatcher,” and the astronaut Dave Bowman, who returns to Earth as a resurrected “star child” (the Messiah in his nativity) is a cosmic history. In the film, the monolith is a signpost, providing the movement through the story from the Earth, the moon, and into outer space as a heavenly calling. These are objects that become the portents for human transcendence (Mamber 60). But in the film, space itself is simultaneously an other-worldly dream, and banal space for corporate meetings on the moon and the cosmic dance of spacecrafts (Mamber 62).

Like Clarke, John's visions are creative writings that constructs another reality through a convergence of disciplines and traditions of knowledge. John takes knowledge literally from the stars by sharing in the narratives of Mesopotamian star charts (McHugh 167). John McHugh claims that John was imprisoned on the Island of Patmos because of "Astronomical prognostication" (168), reading in the heavens his portents (Rev. 12:1 NSRV).

In Imperial Rome practicing magic and astrology were grounds for banishment (McHugh 186). Revelation 12 seems to be evidence for John's banishment in his deliberate reading of the constellations as a map for the profiles of the future. Clarke also affirms that an engagement in places on Earth, its geostationary orbits, and outer space is necessary for human technological futures. John considered his prophecy as the visions of the future in the return of a cosmic Christ who arrives through the atmosphere, witnessed by all. He described the Messiah as "coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him..." (Rev. 1 7 NSRV). Thus, John's aspirations for simultaneous "seeing" align with Clarke's vision for satellite technology, his vision akin to magic.

The island of Patmos provided John with a setting from which he could view the stars as portents to imagine a Christian future. His geographical imagination is responding to his island geography that is evidenced in oceanic parallels. Natural phenomena such as volcanic eruptions on adjacent islands, were transubstantiated into beasts rising from the ocean (Bent 814). His visions can be matched to his island geography. As John looked upward from the territory of the island, the stars were a cosmic map of the world's future that would form his creation of apocalyptic upheaval culminating in the Messiah's return from heaven.

Ian Boxall proclaims that John receives visions that are "Unlike the gospels, the Apocalypse has little interest in the Earthly life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. Instead, it offers dramatic visions of the heavenly Christ..." (119). This cosmic Christ receives his instructions written on a scroll and leaves heaven at the head of an army that invades the Earth (Rev. 4-6 NSRV). The visionary text renders the imaginary of the future, like an epic science fiction film scene in apocalyptic films. Apocalyptic films as a genre demonstrate overwhelming power that Sean Redmond describes as

Stanley Kubrick and Clarke's collaboration film, the spectacular forces of [this] end-of-the-world dreaming..." (Redmond 48). John's apocalyptic genre and his visions are in fact a Christian imperial view.

### **Tropicality**

Marcus Power claims that tropicality is an imperial view that refers to a "potent Western discourse[s], implicated in colonialism" (493). The privileging of European culture is contrasted with "otherness". However, tropicality encompasses not just the cartography of latitudinal lines, but "is a way of thinking metaphorically [through] certain types of experience, vision, and landscape or society" (Gregory et. al. Dictionary 777). Tropicality is the geographical production of the "other." Similarly, the Island of Patmos not only situated the author of *The Book of Revelation* geographically (Boxall 1), but it also situated him in relation to imperial Rome as a prisoner.

The island, whether tropical or in the Mediterranean, is often a site that can project imaginary states in the wake of domination, and imperial forces. Islands inherit the imaginary, particularly claimed as deserted for the purposes of imperialism, a "terra nullius", an unoccupied place and space. Gilles Deleuze and David Lapoujade claims that the "range of islands has no objective unity... it is subject to those human conditions that make mythology possible" (12-13). The importance of geography in the formation of myth is attested by Joseph Campbell. He saw in the geography of Egypt the symbology of its long shape that were the foundations of their myths (117). We also detect in John's vision the symbiosis of the geographic and cosmic imagination, a mythology fermented from his island prison. John responds to his island geography because he encountered through the motions of the Earth, moon, and stars in the heavens a rich and fertile ground for his imagination. The Earth moves through an "astronomical geography" (Freud) demonstrated in John's text of extending the geography of the island of Patmos into the cosmic plane. Dunnett claims that Clarke had interesting ways to reconcile his futuristic visions of spaceflight with the specificities of place noting that in Clarke's novel *The Fountains of Paradise*, he imagines a space elevator in Sri Lanka (780).

In Dunnett's paper, he adapts "cultural and cosmographical readings of tropicity in the context of late-imperial techno-science to consider a concept of 'cosmological tropicity' ... tropical spaces are more intimately aligned with heavenly movements of the cosmos..." (Dunnett 785). Similarly, in the Mediterranean Sea, John of Patmos expressed his place as the centre of imperialism in geography, on an island, a place for his geographical and cosmic imagination. John is reading the terrain and the cosmos from his geographical location as a key to the future of a space exploration as a new political configuration. John considered that Jesus held the stars in his hands (Rev. 1:16 NSRV), testifying to his power over outer space and having command of the angels (Rev. 1:19 NSRV). John's island, although situated in the Mediterranean, is a stage that he could fill with this cosmic imaginary born from the landscape.

### **The Geographical Imagination in Geographies of Outer Space**

John's heavenly visions are likewise interesting ways to overcome his geography and his subjection to the imperialism of Rome, with another form of "the worship of 'man'" (Moore 76), through a transcendent hero. This has echoes of Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the formula for transcending mortality and conquering space requires a male, who dies and is resurrected becoming something more than human. Both authors create visions in the occupation of outer space, by superior beings and superior technologies. These imaginaries provide platforms for encounters with and/or transformation through alien species that they encounter on the journey to immortality. The heavenly spheres, however, are somewhat pedestrian, and really Earth-spaces. John describes a throne with Elders and strange beasts that are waiting for the one who is worthy to open the scroll containing the mission. In *2001: A Space Odyssey*, Bowman is placed in a hotel room awaiting his death and resurrection as a "Star Child" who can move through the universe into our solar system until he overshadows the Earth.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, Dunnett's paper addresses geopolitical cultures of outer space, suggesting that "geopolitical readings of outer space can be understood through investigating diverse aspects of place,

landscape and identity” (770). Using Arthur C. Clarke, he demonstrates the interconnectedness of “imperialism, technology and tropicality” that he argues formed his “geographical imagination” (770). In this same vein I applied Dunnett’s framing to John of Patmos, imprisoned on an island in the Mediterranean that generated his geographical and cosmic imagination concerning empire, magic visions, and his island geography. On Patmos, John developed the view that in the stars were the portents that were a cosmic window on the future. For John the Empire of Rome was a confrontation with geography in a charged political landscape where he imagined an outer space, or heaven, already inhabited by an extra-terrestrial who sits on a throne, strange creatures, a court of Elders and a Messiah who returns to Earth as conqueror (Rev. 4: 3-5, 19:11-16 NSRV). In the physicality and materiality of these islands of Ceylon/Sri Lanka and Patmos that represent imperialism, conquest or imprisonment/confinement, the imagination itself becomes a space of exploration. John’s island geography is all about vision that is tied to an immense cosmic and geographical space, that links heaven and Earth. The biblical text of a faith centred in geography, re-reads the natural world as portents and signs in imaginary encounters with the heavenly.

Both Clarke and John of Patmos demonstrate in their writings a cosmic imaginary tied to imperialism. They were considered as prophets forecasting the future for heaven and Earth. Their writings “can be understood as intimately connected to various conceptions of space and place” (Dunnett 771). They achieved a prophetic aim by exceeding their geography through visions of the cosmic transcendent man. Clarke and Kubrick in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, considered that “man” could only exceed his geography through a rebirth. The final shot in the film uses the images of the cosmic foetus that eclipses the Earth in size as a representation of human destiny. In a type of cosmic nativity, this image combines the fantasy vision of the exultation and immortality of man. Another vision of the phantasmatic cosmic figure for John was Jesus, immaculately conceived, transformed from lamb to lion. Jesus is transformed in biblical texts from mortal, meek, healer of Earthly disease, and servant of the people, in the gospels, to John’s Jesus, a superior being who is a conquering hero and shining figure of the cosmos (Rev. 1:16; 19:12 NSRV).



Clarke's imaginary vision of a superior alien power, in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, begins with the influence exerted through a monolith emitting voices. The indecipherable word holds the secrets to human progression through to immortality. In a similar pattern in John's text, "the word" (John 1:1), that is Jesus, created the world, then in the Book of Revelation, he returns at the head of an invading army to solve John's geopolitical concerns. Both authors encounter imperial geography that engages the geographical imagination portrayed in their writings.

What this case study demonstrates is that John of Patmos engages his geographical imagination in the same vein as Clarke where imperialism, technology, and islands were vectors, the essential elements in visions of human futures. The connections with outer space, like our current context, are hypothetical: The coming of a future that may never arrive. In the Book of Revelation, the geopolitical contest on Earth translates to the creation of encounters with beings and places in other worlds. Significantly, in imagined futures, Clark and John share interplays with literature and landscape that are clearly echoes of the Earth.

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## **Authoring the Earth Goddess: Unplacatable Wilderness and Transgressive Female Power in Daphne du Maurier's *Jamaica Inn***

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**Abstract:** In her memoir *Enchanted Cornwall* Daphne du Maurier wrote that Cornwall had “communicated” with her, and she with Cornwall, for it was there that she “found” herself, “both as a writer and a person” (7). Du Maurier wrote seventeen novels, several biographies and fifteen collections of short stories between 1931 and 1987, mapping her own navigation of this wild landscape and her own identity in a series of works whose geographical settings span England’s most Southernly peninsula. Reflecting in 1989 du Maurier wrote: “Cornwall became my text”, yet the notion of *place as text* which du Maurier explores in her writing extends beyond the textual representation of real geographical places and buildings (7). Du Maurier’s writing has permitted generations of readers to inhabit a textual reconstruction of the rugged Cornish landscape, visiting the shorelines, clifftops and moorlands which characterise “this ancient place” as a wild repository of pagan folklore and Celtic heritage (7). This paper will excavate wild spaces in du Maurier’s 1936 novel *Jamaica Inn* examining the ways in which her writing reinscribes a folk history of the moorlands. Du Maurier’s novel privileges narratives of subversive female power and sexual agency through her narration of wild place, in which pagan folklore of an unplaced goddess infuses the landscape with agential properties, capable of giving and taking life and of shaping female desire. Throughout the text du Maurier authors her own navigation of sexual awakening, female appetites and agencies into her representation of this ancient wilderness, capturing the liberative potential of the wild landscape with which her own agency is intertwined.

**Keywords:** du Maurier, Cornwall, Wilderness, Place, Landscape

English writer Daphne du Maurier, whose work spans over fifty years, embedded her writing within the wild and rugged spaces of Cornwall's lowlands, moors and coastlines. In her memoir *Enchanted Cornwall* du Maurier wrote that Cornwall had "communicated" with her, and she with Cornwall, for it was there that she "found" herself, "both as a writer and a person" (7). Du Maurier wrote seventeen novels, several biographies and fifteen collections of short stories between 1931 and 1987, mapping her own navigation of this wild landscape and her own identity in a series of works whose geographical settings span England's most Southernly peninsula. Reflecting in 1989 du Maurier wrote: "Cornwall became my text", yet the notion of *place as text* which du Maurier explores in her writing extends beyond the textual representation of real geographical places and buildings (7). Du Maurier's writing has permitted generations of readers to inhabit a textual reconstruction of the rugged Cornish landscape, visiting the shorelines, clifftops and moorlands which characterise "this ancient place" as a wild repository of pagan folklore and Celtic heritage (7). Her fourth novel, *Jamaica Inn*, written in 1936, is set within the moors surrounding Bodmin, whose peaks and marshes are characterised by ancient stones, burial mounds and markers of primitive habitation. This paper will excavate the wild spaces of *Jamaica Inn* examining the ways in which her writing reinscribes a folk history of the moorlands. Du Maurier's novel privileges narratives of subversive female power and sexual agency through her narration of wild place, in which pagan folklore of an unplaced goddess infuses the landscape with agential properties, capable of giving and taking life and of shaping female desire. Throughout the text du Maurier authors her own navigation of sexual awakening, female appetites and agencies into her representation of this ancient wilderness, capturing the liberative potential of the wild landscape with which her own agency is intertwined.

In her early life du Maurier grappled with the conflict between her emerging sexuality and the outward societal expectations placed upon her sex, describing the allure of wild place like "a linnets desire to be free from its cage" (Horner and Zlosnik 60). Du Maurier first encountered Cornwall as a child and would return in her early twenties to write, inspired by the liberative wilderness of the Cornish landscape. Throughout this time tensions between the sexual agency du Maurier wished to

explore and the constraint of society was alleviated by the family's holiday home in Fowey which afforded an "escape" from the gendered roles which she viewed with growing resentment and frustration (Forster 47). Robert MacFarlane's work on *The Wild Places* explores the notion of identity in relation to wilderness, noting that for some travellers the quest for the wild "reflected their longing to achieve correspondence between belief and place, between inner and outer landscapes" (24). In her earlier novels, especially *Jamaica Inn*, du Maurier emphasises the alluring freedom she discovered in the coastlands and moors, collapsing a narrative of awakening sexuality onto the wild and challenging terrain she navigates. Her memoirs languish over the isolation of her time at Ferryside, especially her early twenties, when she was permitted to stay at the house in Fowey alone to write, on the understanding that she must sell her stories for enough to live on (Forster 57). During this time of financial independence, the appetites du Maurier explores are carnal and transgressive, her burgeoning sexuality set against recollections of first encounters denied to her in London's society: "memories crowd in thick and fast. Learning to row, to scull, to snare a rabbit and gut a fish. Climbing upon the rotting hulls of abandoned ships. Bathing naked in deserted coves. Trespassing upon estates, even breaking in through shuttered windows" (Vanishing 14). Du Maurier's experience of wild place is transgressive; a "refusal to submit to social regulation" through inhabiting a wilderness which, for du Maurier, constituted "a space of potential, an undoing 'that the young author found alluring and seductive (Halberstam 3). For du Maurier, in both her writing and personal life, wild place constitutes a site of becoming, as both author and her characters navigate emerging sexuality and evade societal constraints within Cornwall's landscape.

Du Maurier's memoirs reveal a preoccupation with the "origins" of place, the topographical features and landmarks which connect Cornwall to the "distant ages" where "ancient" and "wonderous" pagan populations set about shaping the landscape (Vanishing 18). The notion of wild inhabited space which du Maurier's writing explores contrasts with contemporary conceptions of wilderness as "empty of life and hostile in its asperities" (Macfarlane 28). Du Maurier depicts the wild places of Cornwall as transgressive and marginal, writing hardy Celtic-blooded peoples existing

on the rugged edgelands of wild moorland spaces (Vanishing 19). However, du Maurier's exploration of Cornwall's past is mediated by the mysticism of local folklore. She argues that to understand the Cornish, it becomes necessary to recognise that "the place held magic, and whatever dwelt there under a brooding sky should be placated" (20). In *Wild Things* Jack Halberstam writes that wilderness is not "a place you can go, a site you can visit; it cannot be willed into being, left behind, lost or found" (xii). The notion of wilderness, or wild place, Halberstam poses, is bound to the interaction between place and the self, and in histories of long forgotten primitive inhabitation (xii). In modern society wildness is conceived as something that "once existed and has now gone" placing notions of *wild* in opposition with "the modern, the *civilised*, the cultivated, and the real" (ix). Within both her memoir and fictional writing du Maurier utilises female folklore to inscribe wildness, cultivating an ancient landscape where "rocks and stones, hills and valleys, bear the imprint of men who long ago buried their dead beneath great chambered tombs and worshipped the earth goddess" (Vanishing 19). In *Jamaica Inn*, du Maurier's conception of unrestrained female identity is anchored to wild place, collapsing female agency and sexual freedom onto an ancient terrain of pagan folklore.

The wild desire which du Maurier privileges in her place writing evokes her own carnal appetites; the formative years spent gutting rabbits and netting eels after dark are reflected in the trail of dead things which proliferate *Jamaica Inn's* narrative. Drowned men, mysterious plagues and fallen livestock shadow the narrative of sexual awakening and unfolding female agency. In her writing therefore, du Maurier's notion of wild place infuses the Cornish landscape with the threat of unconstrained female power. The pagan landscape which makes death itself, "like the sea, ever present" (Vanishing 20) is simultaneously credited with giving life in du Maurier's writing, birthing men born "twisted, like the blackened shrubs of broom" on Bodmin's moors (Jamaica 13). Du Maurier's moorland men, "sullen and morose tenant" farmers are at the mercy of this landscape, succumbing to a despair shadowed by the unplacated earth goddess (Vanishing 146). Her writing reconstructs an ancient landscape from "an age where men did not exist", excavating narratives of female subversion in the wild moors where "queer" winds "in the crevices of granite [...] sighed"

and “moaned” like “a man in pain” (39). Themes of birth and death are mediated by the transgressive properties of wilderness as du Maurier reincarnates Matt Merlyn’s drowning into the present, to be witnessed again by Mary and the reader. In her own encounter with Bodmin’s moors, du Maurier conjures the figure of a man who “went out one night and drowned himself” in Withey Brook, tormented by the harsh isolation of living in such a place (Vanishing 146). The figure of the earth goddess is therefore associated with the power of taking and giving life, materialising man from the broom covered heathlands and drowning him in the concealed marshes. The notion of wilderness which this essay explores is both carnal and transgressive, as du Maurier collapses themes of birth, rebirth and death onto the subversive figures of pagan female power in the moorlands of Bodmin. Within the novel, it is her own emerging sexuality and carnal appetites which are refracted into the themes of female selfhood and agency for her protagonist, constructing a wild landscape infused with the historicity of ancient landmarks, Cornish folklore and unconstrained female power.

### **Navigating the Wilderness: Placating the Goddess**

The moor on which du Maurier sets *Jamaica Inn* is common land stretching between Launceston and Bodmin from North to South and bordering Liskeard in the East and Camelford in the West (Vanishing 143). Du Maurier records the site as “the greatest and wildest stretch of moorland,” one of the few remaining moors which once comprised the “spine” of Cornwall (143). The moors, like the neighbouring Devonian commons of Dartmoor and Exmoor, are characterised by rising terrain, “frowning tors and craggy rocks” above slopes of rough grazing peppered with well concealed marshes and reed beds (144). In her memoirs, du Maurier describes a landscape which is remote, predominantly inhabited by farms and isolated dwellings whose income today is still sourced from the hardy cattle, sheep and fell ponies which graze there (143). Few trees can survive this topography, where unrelenting winds thrash the landscape even on the stillest of days. Historically, the moors were the setting for sustainable practices such as foraging, as bracken and turf were cut for fires, and where locals passed rarely to drive their cattle to market or to visit neighbouring remote moorland holdings (Hollowell 44). The moor in *Jamaica Inn* is dissected by the A30 road which passes between



Launceston and Bodmin, punctuated at its midpoint by Jamaica Inn. The building, today a museum and popular tourist attraction, was the inspiration for the novel and fictional home of Joss Merlyn and his wife Patience. Beyond the inn, Brown Willy and Rough Tor give way to the more challenging crags before falling away to the sloping woodlands above Trebartha.

Throughout the text, associations are drawn between the moors, superstition and female sexuality as Mary navigates the moorland places where men are said to have drowned in deep pools of concealed marshland and the land mounds over the resting places of pagan spirits who worshipped heathen Gods of fertility and death. At Bodmin, Mary is warned to travel no further by the coachman, who informs her that no one stops at Jamaica anymore (Jamaica 11). The animosity and fear exhibited by the wider community shapes the textual construction of the moors in such a way that the swinging Inn sign and tall chimneys come to embody the role of the gallows. The men who inhabit the rocky inclines are born pre-destined for wickedness, depravity and inevitably the noose. Mary's initial encounters with the townsfolk of Bodmin constructs Jamaica Inn, and the moorlands themselves, as "no place for a girl [...] a wild, rough place" (10). The coach driver further emphasises the sense of uneasiness about Jamaica Inn in his retelling of local lore: "its what people say. Respectable folk don't go to Jamaica anymore" (11). Du Maurier frames the moorland landscape within the negative connotations of a place that is characterised by its un-"respectable" inhabitants and through which people "whip the horses past and wait for nothing" (11). Within this scene, however, du Maurier also agitates gender boundaries, depicting a landscape rich with heathen female power which is proclaimed "no place for a girl" illustrating societal unease about unrestrained female sexuality and agency (10).

In du Maurier's narrative, the "wild, rough" spaces of the moors function as a site of female agency, grounding Mary's sexual awakening in the unrespectable wilderness, which the coach driver had considered unsuitable for a girl. As Mary continues her journey towards Jamaica Inn, she rehearses patriarchal anxieties about female sexuality, perceiving "malevolence" in the quiet of the coach journey which had previously "rocked her like a cradle" (13). Here, du Maurier frames female

fertility, inferred by the image of the rocking cradle, with the threat or ‘malevolence’ produced by its liberation from societal restrictions. On the moors, freed from constraint, female sexuality is depicted in the wild place, a corrupting and dangerous force causing “children to be born twisted [...] their minds twisted too, their thoughts evil, dwelling as they must amidst marshland and granite, harsh heather and crumbling stone” (13). Du Maurier layers the landscape with relics of pre-Christian beliefs and female subversion, infusing the moorlands with a paganism which resists patriarchy and instead embraces a primitivism associated with female authority and superstition.

In the novel du Maurier excavates local folklore of the moors, privileging the ancient dead of Cornish myth such as the “weeping queens” of Avalon who rest beneath the lands where Iseult seduced Tristan: all “buried now [...] never to be disturbed again by pick and spade” (Vanishing 35). Du Maurier’s moors are shaped by this notion of wild and primitive place, characterised by lineages of subversive and powerful women, famed for their “seduction and betrayal” (31). Despite associations between Cornish folklore and the well-known figures of Mark, Tristan and Arthur, it is the women of these legends who haunt du Maurier’s wild landscapes. Her memoirs resurrect the ancient moors where “centuries dissolve” and standing stones reveal a long dead “queen or priestess” awaiting her “passage to the underworld” to “defy ‘man’s answers [...] to the challenge of death” (20). Within the novel it is this primitive landscape which Mary navigates, situating her unfolding sexuality against a terrain of female power which resists the passing of time and which codes the moors with superstition and death. Du Maurier contrasts this depiction of the moors with Jamaica Inn itself, positioning the tall chimneys of Jamaica on the long road between Bodmin and Launceston on the “breast of a hill” surrounded by “rough” moorland, “looming ink-black in the mist” (Jamaica14). The isolated setting of Jamaica Inn, detached from settlements, farms and nearby towns, alongside its raised positioning affords the site with the same characteristics as rural gallows sites, and within the text the Inn’s parlour becomes the location for a hanging when Mary discovers a “rope slung through a hook” in a beam (61). Later that night, while she lies awake in bed Mary hears the groaning of the Inn sign swinging “gently to and fro” and mistakes it for a dead man hanging in a gibbet (27). Du

Maurier places the moors in opposition with the Inn, contrasting the way in which both sites frame death. Jamaica stands, gallows like, as setting for a male death and violence, overshadowed by a landscape invested with spectral female power and Cornish folklore. The towering chimneys of the Inn also invest the site with male virility and the violence evoked by the smuggling activity which takes place there. The proximity of the moors, and the saturation of this landscape with female freedom and power, mediates the threat of the noose and the depravity associated with Jamaica Inn.

Helford, Mary Yellan's childhood home, is also set against the wild moorlands of Bodmin, which lie "barely forty miles away by road" (Jamaica 3). The narration of Mary's homeland takes place as she journeys away from it towards an uncertain future, and her early depictions of home are loaded with a nostalgia at odds with the narrative of death, sickness and loss which precipitates her departure. Helford is situated among "green hills and sloping valleys" where "gentle rain" and "grateful soil" mark the opposing spaces of Bodmin and the moorlands as harsh and bleak, a land characterised by "stones, black heather and stunted broom" (3). This depiction loads Helford with the sentimentality that is produced by her exile from it, reconstructing her home of twenty-three years from within the walls of the carriage that carry her away from it. This passage echoes du Maurier's own childhood journey to Cornwall, where sitting in a rail carriage with her mother, she describes being "disenchanted" by a landscape which fell short of her expectations: "I went on staring out of the window. There must be a mistake. Somewhere there awaited the hidden land. It was not this" (Vanishing 13). Like Mary Yellan, du Maurier's expectations of place are thwarted by her initial encounters with an unremarkable landscape, which cannot compete with the memories of home that both young women have left behind.

For both young women, their disenchantment with the moors of Cornwall betrays the extent of their desire for the wilderness such place promises, and the alluring freedom associated with that notion of wild place. Du Maurier's memoirs reveal a yearning for the "tremendous" vision of rugged place which her mother had promised, where smugglers might lurk, and where she might be freed from the restrictions associated with her home (Vanishing 13). In *Jamaica Inn*, Mary's agency is

similarly curtailed by the home which she initially sentimentalises, where following her mother's death, she is not permitted to live or work and is denied any involvement in decisions about her future: "One by one Mary saw the things she had loved and understood pass into other hands. The livestock went at Helston market. The furniture was bought by neighbours [...] A man from Coverack took a fancy to the house" (8). In this opening narrative, death displaces Mary, making her "an interloper in her own home"; however, the moorlands, also coded with death, afford Mary the autonomy which her homeland had denied her (8). The wilderness of the "barren moor" is reframed as the sea as Mary narrates her "desolate" journey where the "wind thundered in the rigging and the and the sea licked her decks" (12). Du Maurier's childhood desire to see the landscape of smugglers is echoed in this scene where the two young women gaze out of windows at strange and unknown place. However, she invests this imagery with paganism, describing a "menace" in the sway of the carriage as it carried her further across this "dark and silent land" where men were still touched by "the Devil" (13). Du Maurier's notion of the moors as a primitive space is made visible in the threat of a godless landscape, with Mary positioned passively being carried across it, in the form of a ship at the mercy of the waves and in the dark confines of the carriage. However, it is precisely this primitivism which later permits Mary, and du Maurier herself, to anchor herself into the wild spaces of Cornwall and assert her burgeoning selfhood onto this rugged landscape.

Early in the text, du Maurier grapples with cultural perceptions of the moorland, and wilderness, through the mysterious sickness which precipitates Mary's relocation to the moors. Du Maurier's engagement with the moorlands is framed by the extent to which they are embedded within folklore and myth: a "reliance on the old magic that had never died away" (*Vanishing* 113). Her memoirs shape a topography dominated by the superstitions and beliefs associated with healing and health, midwifery and folklore, where still, driven by "instinct, infallible" men pay homage to whatever ancient power remains beneath "field and furze" (20). The way in which du Maurier frames myths of female power with the "stillness" of death reinforces the associations between the moors and a "concealed" and subversive female power, which "should be placated" (20). In *Vanishing*

*Cornwall*, du Maurier recounts a local legend from 1664 in which a “shower of blood” rained upon the rocky outcrops of the moors, staining the stone red, a foreshadowing of the Black Death which broke out less than a day later (156). In *Jamaica Inn*, this folklore of unappeased power is reframed in the sickness which sweeps across Helford, and which constitutes a foreshadowing of the events which lead Mary to Jamaica Inn. In the months before her mother’s death, a nameless sickness overshadows the “shining waters of home”, indiscriminately savaging cattle, poultry and Nell the mare, “much as a late frost will out of season, coming with the new moon and then departing, leaving no trace of its passage save the little trail of dead things in its path” (Jamaica 3). In this passage the narrator’s language ascribes the inevitability of the changing seasons to the disease which plagues her home. Du Maurier uses this perception of the moors to collapse boundaries between place, such that the illness which indiscriminately plagues Helford’s lush landscape is invoked in the bleak moorlands which the narrative constructs. Mary’s opening narrative describes the moors as “wasted country” where “no human being could live”, recalling the sickness which indiscriminately extinguishes ducklings, cattle and finally her own mother (5).

Throughout the novel, du Maurier’s descriptions of the Merlyn family draw on her own travels across Bodmin, mirroring the imagined fate of the desolate farmer drowned in Withey Brook in the demise of Joss’s younger brother, Matt, who drowned in the marshes below Kilmar Tor. In the novel, Mary walks the East Moor and finds herself below the Tor: “somewhere amongst that solid mass of stone, where the ridges hid the sun, Joss Merlyn had been born, and his brother lived today” (Jamaica 40). Mary narrates the Merlyn men into the landscape, destined to be born, to live and to die within the shadows of the tors, “born twisted and evil” (115). This description of the brothers mirrors the opening description of the moorland folk, who, Mary fears, must be born “twisted like the blackened shrubs of broom” (13). The repetition of this phrasing invokes the threat of unconstrained female sexuality, betraying Mary’s awakening sexuality. Throughout the novel, the time Mary spends on the moors near Jem’s cottage is rich with references to paganism, omens and superstitious encounters generated by the flora and fauna of the moorland landscape and her interactions with it. As Mary

stares at the marsh where her uncle's brother drowned, memory reanimates the past tragedy in the screaming call of a curlew which rises from the marsh, "flapping his wings and whistling his mournful cry" (40). Within this scene, Mary's own encounter with place is coded with the subversive power of the moors, resurrecting the instance of Matt's drowning into the present such that the curlew's call melds with the "panic-stricken" screams of the man who "floundered helplessly, beating the weed with his hands" (40).

Du Maurier saturates the marshes with pagan references to death, sickness and healing, constructing a "trail of dead things" onto the moorland landscape Mary navigates (Jamaica 4). Mary's unfolding sexuality is situated against this pagan landscape, couched within a lineage of female subversion capable of blurring the boundaries of time and ultimately death (Vanishing 20). After the curlew has passed over the ridge, Mary notices that the landscape is quiet again, the thrashing of the drowning man subsiding into the silence of memory. Later in the novel, before Mary discovers Jem's cottage, she encounters the portentous curlew once again, sending it soaring into flight, "calling his plaintive note" in mimicry of Mary's earlier encounter (Jamaica 111). The ponies which Jem grazes on the slopes surrounding the cottage, a rare sign of wealth and fortune in a landscape most often grazed by cattle and hardy sheep, evoke the Cornish lore that passing a sick child beneath the stomach of a piebald mare would cure whooping cough (Vanishing 115). Natural springs and streams were also believed to have healing properties and Jem's cottage is set "on the slope of the hill above the Withy Brook" (Jamaica 117). Mary's interactions with place and her unfolding agency precipitate these encounters, reinforcing associations between the wilderness of the moors and a lineage of transgressive female power. As Mary's sexuality awakens du Maurier invokes the image of the unplaced goddess of folklore, temporarily investing Mary with the ability to exhume the dead from the marshland.

In a later scene Mary is captured by her uncle and his band of smugglers, bound and subjected to violence and depravity as the drunken men work up to a "a state of wild excitement [...] the presence of a woman amongst them brought a vicious tang to their enjoyment" (Jamaica 177). Despite

Mary's "weakness and distress", her burgeoning sexuality continually undermines the company who become distracted by her desirability, "laughing and singing to win her notice" (177). Later, abandoned in the carriage while the men head for the shoreline, Mary is reinvigorated with the "feeling of shelter" produced by the sound of the sea, restoring agency as she affects her escape from the carriage (179). Du Maurier loads this scene with references to subversive female power, employing the proximity of the waves to construct Mary's maturation through a process which evokes rebirth. Within this wild place the early descriptions of men born blighted by the pagan landscape is reframed in Mary's delivery into maturation and womanhood. As she attempts to squeeze through a small gap in the carriage window, childbirth is evoked in the description of "a sickening squeeze and pressure" as her hips pass through the gap, a "trickle of blood" that accompanies her entry into the landscape followed by a moment of weakness in which she "fell backwards" landing headfirst on the ground below (180). In the encounters with menfolk that follow, Mary's agency is heightened, investing her with the subversive power of the wild place into which she has been delivered. The transgressive delivery, in which sexual maturation is borne from blood loss displaces both the socially ordained act of lost virginity and the notion of birth with a wild embrace that is inherently feminine. Here du Maurier invokes the earth goddess again, delivering Mary onto the moorland soil with a ritualistic blood-letting suggestive of primitive practices of sacrifice and worship. In the moments that follow du Maurier authors an agency which evades capture by Harry the Peddler and reinforces Mary's power, as she fights off the men and embraces the obscurity the moors in 'a wall of fog which closed in upon her '(182). The mysticism of the fog, which conceals Mary's movements shrouds the men, consuming them as the marshes had consumed Matt Merlyn.

In this scene the transgressive power of wild place culminates in simultaneous acts of rebirth, maturation and death, framed by the primitive female power which now lies placated. In the final pages of the novel Mary recognises that within this rugged landscape she was "at liberty now to go where she would" ascribing a sense of liberation in her inhabitation of the moors (Jamaica 293). Du Maurier's closing paragraphs reflect the ritualistic attainment of Mary's autonomy, as wild place "had

lost its menace” and the “old malevolence” of a landscape invested with unplaced desire lies dormant under a “clear blue sky” (293). The way of life which Jem offers her, to rove the wilderness with “never any ties, nor roots ... with the sky for a roof and earth for a bed” concludes Mary’s narrative transition from socially sanctioned domesticity to a wild notion of home embedded within the ancient habitation practices of her pagan forbears (299). In the close of the narrative du Maurier’s protagonist is authored into the landscape, between the earth and sky, written into the lineage of women associated with the moors. It is through this wild land, and her rebirth into that, that du Maurier interweaves Mary’s agency with the pagan goddesses which shape the Cornish moorlands. In the closing lines Mary’s speech mirrors du Maurier’s own writing of Cornwall; as the place “where I belong to be” (302). *Jamaica Inn* therefore, not only authors Mary’s belonging but also du Maurier’s own, writing herself and her protagonist into the wild landscape of Cornwall’s moors.

### **Conclusion**

For du Maurier, the essence of Cornwall and the Cornish people is encapsulated by its landscapes and the histories and folklores which those landscapes preserve. Within the coastlines, commons and coves, barrows and Tors, du Maurier identifies histories of occupation, ritual and burial practices which layer the landscape with a primitive paganism. However, du Maurier’s memoirs reveal the extent to which her perception of this landscape is mediated by Cornish folklore, infusing place with the subversive power of ancient women capable of reading the omens, evading death and resisting patriarchal authority. Her memoirs retrace the movements of mythical queens and goddesses onto the barren moors and lush lowlands of Cornwall’s landscapes, constructing a lineage of transgressive women. Du Maurier’s love for the Cornish landscape is sympathetic to this relationship between place and history, positioning her novels within the ancient and mysterious spaces of Cornish folklore. However, her writing is also introspective, privileging a personal account of topography and terrain which seeks to preserve the Cornish spaces integral to her own navigation of independence, societal expectations and sexual awakening.



Like du Maurier, *Jamaica Inn*'s protagonist maps the spaces of Cornish folklore, constructing a topography shaped by the barrows and stones which load the moors with ritualistic paganism (Vanishing 144). It is her own memories of the moors which give shape to the terrain she authors, in which rural ways of life, female agency and wilderness are celebrated. Against Brown Willy and Kilmar Tor the text constructs a Cornish landscape saturated with pagan relics of its primitive history, folklore and superstition (Trower 202). The mysticism of marshes and bogs concealed between tor peaks come to signify places of death, drowning sites and by extension burial grounds, which du Maurier frames with references to the image of the pagan earth goddess who must be appeased. It is this depiction of unplaced female power which the author uses to explore her own, and Mary's unfolding sexuality, constructing a female resistance to societal constraint and patriarchal control in the narrative's depiction of coming of age and wild rebirth.

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## **The Seascape as a Site of Materiality and Memory: Intimacy with the Elemental in *The Old Man and the Sea***

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**Abstract:** The scholarship on Ernest Hemingway's major writing endeavour, *The Old Man and the Sea*, has been reinvigorated in the recent decades with the development of ecocritical studies across the globe. While hailed by many scholars as a potential text for environmental criticism in the way it foregrounds nature and portrays an intricate nexus between humans and the nonhuman world, the short novel has also invited criticism from a section of critics for its traditional trope of man's victory over nature. However, reading *The Old Man and the Sea* through a lens of material ecocriticism, can offer an environmental ethics that celebrates the agency and materiality of the ocean, often overshadowed in the holistic discourse of nature and often neglected in land-based ecocriticism. The seascape portrayed in the novella inculcates this ethics in the protagonist Santiago, an old Cuban fisherman, through its overwhelmingly dynamic material and non-material presence. Santiago's human hubris slowly gives in to the power of the seascape, making him acknowledge the limitations of humans as a species. His growing intimacy with the elementality of the ocean can be read as a call to understanding seascape as a site of materiality and memory.

**Keywords:** Seascape, Materiality, Memory, Anthropocentrism, Blue Humanities

In the age of the Anthropocene, it could be a legit argument vis-à-vis who the real protagonist is in *The Old Man and the Sea*, which essentially explores the complex dynamics between an old Cuban seasoned fisherman, Santiago and the ever-flowing, lively Gulf Stream waters. In an era when environmental humanities and ethics are on the rise globally, this literary masterpiece by Nobel laureate Ernest Hemingway has rekindled interest among critics and environmental enthusiasts for its powerful portrayal of non-human beings and things. However, because of a dominant holistic

approach in environmentalism, oftentimes, individual entities presented in the texts may not be sufficiently foregrounded. In addition, the rise of Animal Studies has found a way in the novel to study the dynamics between humans and non-human animals. Therefore, there is still more scope to conduct scholarly research on one of the crucial elemental matters of the planet that is all around us—one of the pairs in the title—the sea itself. This paper intends to probe into the depiction of oceanic water and its effects on humans, solely focusing on its intrinsic value and agency. Drawing on references from material ecocriticism and vibrant materialism, it argues that this novel is so rich in portraying the agency and materiality of the seascape that it can inculcate in readers, as it does with Santiago, a certain environmental ethics marked by respect and reciprocity towards the non-human world. This paper, thus, intends to situate the novel in the broader framework of blue humanities and material ecocriticism in order to unleash its potential to disrupt the anthropocentric, land-based worldview.

*The Old Man and the Sea* is the tale of Santiago, an old, poor and solitary fisherman living on the coast of Cuba. His unwavering spirit, expressed through his “cheerful and undefeated” eyes, can be evident in the way he fights against all the odds both on land and the sea (Hemingway 1). Living alone in a basic shack, he has limited human contact. The only human company he enjoys is his disciple-cum-friend Manolin, a young boy who is loyal to him despite the local community considering Santiago as “salao, which is the worst form of unlucky” (1). Santiago must prove that he is not all wasted by voyaging into the unknown part of the ocean. As the plot develops, the landscape is replaced by the seascape, and the human characters are replaced by nonhuman animals ranging from birds to fishes. The novel, then, invites readers into such a powerful ecosystem that Santiago is found to have interacted with various elemental forces of nature such as water, air, the moon, the stars. Though it ends with Santiago’s returning to the island—half-victorious and half-defeated—with the skeleton of a giant marlin, the major plot developments occur in close proximity with the natural seascape, especially with the Atlantic oceanic waters. This water-submerged tale, thus, is a

rich text to recognize and appreciate the elemental forces of nature imbued with unique dynamism and agency.

The ethical questions between human and non-human relationships have informed the recent ecocritical discourse of *The Old Man and Sea*. Glen Love deduces a conventional ecological phenomenon, arguing that the central problem of the novel is portraying the “natural world as the arena for human greatness but effecting thereby [the world's] further diminishment” (129). Using an eco-feminist lens, Susan Beegel speaks in favour of calling the sea as ‘la mar,’ and progressively discusses the novel’s tendency to “abandon... the anthropocentric critical practice of relegating nature to the role of setting” (153). While certain critics have identified the “harmonious relationship” between man and nature, others shed light on human’s desire to dominate the natural world (Zhang 1095). Zhiqiang Zhang argues that the novel testifies how in respecting nature, “human can live in harmony with the nonhuman” (1097). On the other hand, Shanyu Lin believes the novel exposes the consequences of “destroying and conquering nature,” suggesting how human activities can result in the punishment from nature if they stand against the natural environment (621). She continues: “Santiago’s anthropocentrism hoped that the great marlin would bring benefits to human beings, and this anthropocentrism results in its final defeat” (622). However, she also argues that Santiago is not presented as an archetype of nature-destroyer who desires to conquer nature like another fictional character Ahab in Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*. Rather, Santiago, subverting the traditional anthropocentrism, is “challenging the authority of nature for the sake of livelihood” (Lin 623). On a similar note, Marta Tores Lucea considers the protagonist of the novel not as a prototypical man that we normally encounter in fiction but “a wise, courageous, persistent and balanced individual” (34). Labelling Santiago’s wisdom “as a source of humility,” she contends that what separates him from others is “the wide knowledge that he has of the local marine environment” (37). His recognition of a human’s worth and power comes from a deeper understanding of the oceanic ecosystem.

However, this paper does not endorse the idea of gendering the sea or finding a utopian harmony in nature. It also maintains that the novel is just more than a simple ecological wisdom tale

of an apparent harmony or man's dignified survival; rather, it can be read as an attempt to understand the world that is full of non-human agency and materiality. In this regard, the paper aligns more with Alex Hollenberg's argument of labelling the novel as a "spacious text" (1). Hollenberg argues how nature moves from the backdrop "to occupy the narrative foreground" (1). Pointing at Hemingway's refusal to relegate nature to a passive background, he observes the novel's transformation from initial "imagining of space-as-human" (earlier in the novel, the sea is called as 'la mar') into a "recognition of space-as-space" (1). Considering the sea as secondary or valuable only in connection with humans may rob water off its agency and unique dynamism. Jane Bennett rightly asserts non-human matters as "thing-power" which are capable of changing the course of human actions and thoughts for their intrinsic vitality (2). She argues that considering the matter as dead, passive or instrumentalized may "feed human hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption" (xi). What is required here is to consider the sea, in Susan Beegel's words, as "a protagonist on an equal footing with Santiago," which deserves to be studied and valued in its own terms and for its inherent, elemental values (153).

With the recent developments of material ecocriticism, vibrant materialism, and blue humanities, water cannot be simply perceived as an empty space to be exploited for livelihood, resources, and navigation. Since material ecocriticism examines "matter both in texts and as a text," the rich watery narrative functions as an apt platform which may help us recognize the "storied matter" of water (Iovino and Oppermann 1-2). Foregrounding the agency of matter, theorists Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann suggest that material ecocriticism not only analyses the representation of "matter's (or nature's) non-human agentic capacities" but also focuses on "matter's 'narrative' power of creating configurations of meanings and substances" (79). Following the ethos of material ecocriticism, the paper intends to explore the depiction of the centrality of water in the text along with what the seascape narrates to us as a text in terms of material significance. Foregrounding the vibrant materialities of water, the novel allows us into a spatial space that makes humans merely a spectator against an immeasurable, gigantic elemental force. In addition, this

material site not only reminds the protagonist of his personal memory but also connects him with collective memory in relation to water. Like material ecocriticism, vibrant materialism as propounded by Jane Bennett underlines “the material agency or effectivity of nonhuman or not-quite human things” (viii). The novel presents the seascape as a site that enacts performances of vibrant materialism which may highlight “a vitality intrinsic to materiality,” releasing the representation of non-human matter “from its long history of attachment to automatism or mechanism” (Bennett 3). First and foremost, *The Old Man and the Sea* unfolds, predominantly, the power of one elemental force of nature—water. This is made possible by allowing the gulf waters to submerge, metaphorically speaking, the apparently human-driven plot. The actions, in major parts, take place on the seascape, making the sea as central as the human protagonist, Santiago.

The transformation of Santiago from a somewhat proud, masculine man to a wiser, more sensible human is achieved with the mentorship of the sea that grounded and humbled him. Going beyond “the smell of the land,” Santiago enters into a seascape away from man-made civilization and agency (Hemingway 12). His entry into ocean wilderness places him not in the position of a master or explorer anymore, but as an observer and admirer of nature. Susan Beegel in her “A Guide to the Marine Life in Ernest Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea*” categorically maps out Santiago’s deep connection to the otherness of the ocean and its creatures. His going out too far in the ocean exposes him to the uncanny agency of the waters. She summarizes Santiago’s masterful creation by the author: “A few strokes of his [Hemingway’s] pen sufficed to limn a lifetime of intimacy with the sea and its creatures” (309). On a similar note, Ryan Hediger discusses in detail the style and aesthetics of the novel which evidently conveys Santiago’s “keen, embodied awareness of the Cuban marine environment and its life, and that awareness is not only valuable in itself, but fundamentally informs his ethical considerations” (38). He maintains that Santiago’s ethics has been presented as a “rigorous, ongoing process” which finally attains its maturity while confronting with the great marlin out in the seascape (38). Hediger’s comment on Santiago is justified who is “simultaneously shown both as knowledgeable and as relatively insignificant, with a sense of insignificance actually

heightened by his knowledge” (48). This non-anthropocentric knowledge is achieved via a waterscape where land-based human’s agency is challenged and found limited in comparison to sea-based eco-centric wisdom.

Santiago’s changing perspective of the seascape is evident as the plot unfolds. He starts off as an explorer, proving his worth as a skilled fisherman. Feminizing the sea, he calls it “kind,” “very beautiful,” and “cruel” which “gave or withheld great favours” (Hemingway 10). Though the narrative begins with his attempt to defeat the marlin and to control natural force in order to prove his worth as an able man, his final act of leaving of the skeleton of the fish signals a realization in his character. He does not shy away from accepting the superiority of non-human agency while confronting the marlin: “Never have I seen a greater, or more beautiful, or a calmer or more noble thing than you, brother” (43). Foregrounding the elemental materiality of water progressively in the novel, Hemingway allows his protagonist to come to close proximity with the marine environment. The following passage powerfully captures not only Santiago’s close observation but also water’s inherent, complex dynamics:

The water was a dark blue now, so dark that it was almost purple. As he looked down into it he saw the red sifting of the plankton in the dark water and the strange light the sun made now... nothing showed on the surface of the water but some patches of yellow, sun-bleached Sargasso weed and the purple, formalized, iridescent, gelatinous bladder of a Portuguese man-of-war floating dose beside the boat. (Heminway 15)

The novel is filled with several non-sentimental, non-anthropocentric, matter-of-fact passages which underline elemental mesh like this. The intimacy with the elemental makes him a wise man who is capable of thinking in a non-anthropocentric term. Disrupting strong anthropocentrism, he is able to give respect and love to the marlin for what it stands for: “‘Fish,’ he said, ‘I love you and respect you very much’” (Hemingway 24). His long exposure to the sea and its material conditions opens an alternative window to understanding the world around. His nurtured eco-consciousness made him able to “see through and beyond what is immediately apprehended by the physical eye” (Strychacz



243). He is able to see the common pattern between human and non-human life forms. Talking to a small bird that made itself comfortable in the boat, we hear him utter something profound: “‘Take a good rest, small bird,’ he said. ‘Then go in and take your chance like any man or bird or fish’” (Hemingway 25). This not only highlights his knowledge about the ecosystem but also his ethical attitude towards it.

Santiago’s learning takes place beyond human-controlled domain—in unfathomable, unknowable dark waters. Hemingway’s use of vast space constantly challenges both Santiago and readers’ ability to know, comprehend and communicate with the sea. I agree with Hollenberg in saying that Santiago’s confrontation with spaciousness has helped him recognize the limits of understanding the non-human others in terms of its elementalities. Hollenberg argues how the novel eventually recognizes the sea as “a space”—a shift from its initial anthropomorphism (1). Drawing on Hemingway’s use of vast space and simple passages, he posits that whenever “space irrupts into the foreground,” it produces “moments of self-consciousness” in Santiago (3). This site of learning is informed by myriad, constantly evolving elemental forces that make an ocean what it is. Its size, shape, color, course, and current are beyond human cognition. Reminding us of the intrinsic agency and metamorphic power of the fundamental elements such as waters, critics Oppermann and Iovino rightly assert: “All are generative, always, becoming, always in flux, going through inevitable stages of metamorphosis” (310). The novel consistently refers to water’s agentic materiality and its complex connection with other matters: “iridescent bubbles,” “the myriad flecks of the plankton,” “the great deep prisms,” and so on (Hemingway 15-17). Santiago cannot also overlook a magnificent island of Sargasso weed “that heaved and swung in the light sea as though the ocean were making love with something under a yellow blanket” (33). These complex dynamics of water can challenge our informed knowledge about the sea at any point in time. Santiago’s awe in the exuberance and magnitude of the sea, even if he is knowledgeable about the marine environment, is a testimony of water’s overpowering agency over humans. Santiago happily accepts his smaller role in this dynamics, letting go of his previous heroic status symbol when on the land he defeated the black man

in a wrestling and earned the prestigious title “El Campeon” (Hemingway 32). His humbled state is evident in the way he interacts with the marlin, calling it a true friend and a worthy opponent. Drawing on post-humanist scholarship and rhetorical criticism, Stephens and Cools opine that Santiago finds an “amazing grace” by learning “to live within limits—those of nature and his own” (78). They focus on how his human hubris takes a backseat when the water submerged, giant marlin forces him to come to terms with a greater force. He slowly learns to “recognize and respect the marlin’s agency” which can “dwarf” that of humans (45, 83). They maintain that Santiago achieved a “humbled state of grace” which is a “mature man’s submission to a natural order in which humans cannot presume dominance” (92). Hollenberg argues on a similar note discussing how Santiago’s confrontation with the sea increasingly “broadens his sense of responsibility to the world and thus reveals to him the possibility of imagining himself in other ways- neither as conqueror, nor victim, but as an ecological participant” (40). When someone like Santiago, who already maintains a heroic nobility in him, is humbled by nature’s greater grace, it is implied that humanist pride and heroism cannot be the epicenter of human thought process.

The vast non-human space broadens Santiago’s imagination, making him connect to his past. To Santiago, the seascape does not serve only as a place of learning but also as a site of memory. Oppermann and Iovino believe that fundamental elements such as water “bind the fate and presence of humans and other Earthlings in their interlocked journey of matter and imagination” (310). Pointing at water’s crucial presence in environmental imagination, they argue how this inevitable presence “signifies reflections and images, and ... undeniably evokes ‘reverie’” (311). Santiago’s connection with the sea is partly because of his ancestor’s long exposure to the sea as fishermen. The novel signals Santiago’s birth in the Canary Islands, and his consequent immigration to North America. Hemingway clarifies it in a letter to Lillian Ross, “The Old Man was born a catholic in the island of Lanza Rota [sic] in the Canary Islands” (*Selected Letters* 807). Critic Jeffrey Herlihy, in his quest of Santiago’s national, cultural, and linguistic identity, suggests that before emigrating to Cuba, Santiago made a number of journeys from the Canary Islands to the African coast, and as “an old

man he dreams from time to time about the lions he saw from the decks” (26). He shares his childhood stories with Manolin many a times regarding his visit to the African coast as a native of the Canary Islands where he witnessed the lions playing carefree: “When I was your age I was before the mast on a square-rigged ship that ran to Africa and I have seen lions on the beaches in the evening” (Hemingway 8). His sense of isolation from the community is evident in the novel which can be an outcome of his being (feeling of) an outsider. However, what is also significant here is to remember the history of mass migration for a better living or religious freedom from Europe to America through the Atlantic. The reference to African sea shore also reminds us of the inhuman slave trade which stands as a stark contrast to carefree, playful lions on the African beach. The sea route has been not only a gateway to fishing and trade since time immemorial but also a repository for history such as mass migration and slave trade from Africa to North America. Santiago’s desire to be as free and authentic as lions seems to be born out of his realization of humanity’s violation of natural order and creation of a hierarchical world order.

Santiago considers himself as a born fisherman who learns both from his collective memory and personal experience, refusing not to see the sea around us. His desire to go into the unknown dark waters also reminds us of our bond with water even before we were born. The connection between memory and water goes a long way with our memory in a mother’s watery womb. Rachel Carson, in *The Sea Around Us*, elucidates in a chapter titled “Mother Sea” how all life forms evolve from the sea and how the growth of the human embryo echoes this evolutionary memory. Carson hypothesizes that man’s desire to return to “mother sea” stems from his evolutionary memory and yearning for a space that, “in the deepest part of his subconscious mind, ... never wholly forgotten” (8). Initially overwhelmed, Santiago finally feels at home in the watery womblike space, in Hemingway’s words “the great well” (10). Since it is not possible to re-enter oceanic space, Carson argues, humans have used “the skill and ingenuity and reasoning powers of his mind” to re-enter the watery world mentally and imaginatively (8). However, she also reminds us that humans can only return to the mother sea only on her own terms (8). Carson’s argument justly applies to Santiago who, though breathes on

land, finds his soul stirring and alive on the sea. A long sea voyage, away from the civilized race of human, dominated by water, sky, stars, makes one realize his true space on earth: “as never on land, he knows the truth that his world is a water world, a planet dominated by its covering mantle of ocean” (Carson 9). Life on the oceanic waters, gradually, makes Santiago realize that not only the fish, birds, and other living organism are the inhabitants of the planet but also the wind, the stars, the moon, and the sun have their unique roles in the ecosystem. When Manolin says at the end of the novel that he has a lot to learn from Santiago, it can be assumed that he (Santiago) will pass down this valuable piece of knowledge about the sea to him (Manolin). Santiago’s belief that the sea is something “that gave or withheld great favors” and his experience on the sea for the last eighty-seven days, truly, are a testimony to water’s inexplicable power over human knowledge and memory (Hemingway 11).

The seascape as a mentor of life and a mirror of memory provides Santiago, a modern-day seafarer, with valuable insight about life and death, and about human and non-human others which could not have been possible without his intimacy with the elemental force of nature. Hemingway’s depiction of water, devoid of sentimentality and strong anthropomorphism, is powerful in its vivid, yet straightforward genuineness. This authenticity along with foregrounding of water to the point of elevating it as a plot-forwarding protagonist make *The Old Man and the Sea* as an apt eco-materialist fiction. Reading this masterpiece keeping in mind the recent “material turn” in ecocriticism may truly enrich our understanding of water and its relationship with humans in the age of Anthropocene. A world teeming with water pollution, water commodification, water crisis, and last but not the least, transborder water politics is in need of a proper water ethic that respects its agency, individuality, and autonomy. A close proximity with water as a great elemental force of nature, not as a resource or an empty space, is required to appreciate water’s crucial role in the evolutionary history of human civilization as is found in the novel. It will not be an overstatement to say that the water wisdom embedded in the novel is capable of producing more Santiagos in the time to come who may be as ecologically attuned and respectful towards the seascape and the non-human world, in general.

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## **Tharu of/at Margin: Ethnicity, Shared Life and Ecological Arbitration of Borderland**

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**Abstract:** This paper studies the impact of historical repercussions on the Tharu ethnicity of Nepal residing at the borderland of Nepal and India to generalise the reasons for promoting their locality as an eco-resort. For this, it examines how ecology and nature shape their sociocultural and economic consciousness. It critically analyses how the agrarian lifestyle promotes ecotourism in Tharu space. The study incorporates folk literature, primarily folk-dance songs of the community, postcolonial ideas on peasants' consciousness, cultural studies, and tourism development theories. In their consideration of agency, autonomy, and territoriality, Marcela Tovar-Restrepo, Clara Irazabal, and Deborah Bird Rose contend that some types of sociability, agency, and autonomy in the case of Indigenous people manifest themselves as a relationship between them and their territories (43, 312). Discussing territoriality as one of the elementary aspects of Tharu consciousness and the dominant theme of their folk-dance songs uses Ranajit Guha's idea of rewriting the peasants' historiography. Understanding their folk literature from the cultural critical perspective of subalternity, dominance, and the peasants' consciousness can work effectively for their sustainable growth. In her book *Ecotourism and Sustainable Development: Who Owns Paradise*, Martha Honey argues that such programs support the spread of environmental consciousness and aid in preserving natural resources. The Tharus inhabit not only the geographical borderland but also the socio-political borderlands, where their agency and identity become inevitable in developing their land as an eco-resort.

**Keywords:** Tharu, Borderland, Ecology, Performance, Agency

### **Introduction**

Tharu folk literature comprises sentiments of their historiography and the celebration of their rich eco-spiritual life. Folk dance songs signify their connectedness to the land around which they inhabit.

The songs, Jhumra and Maina, have rich embeddedness of their deep ecological conscience as they consider nature their first God and land his precious gift. Their interconnectedness with nature could be observed by critically examining their Jhumra and Maina songs. Moreover, their land or physical and cultural space could be developed as an ecological and cultural resort to alleviate their economic poverty. Understanding their sociopolitical history, cultural practices, and literature can help secure their social, cultural, and economic progress. Thus, this paper argues for uplifting their socioeconomic situation by transforming and utilizing their rich sociocultural phenomenon into educational and economic activities in the form such as tribal museums and tribal eco-resorts.

### **Methodological Interpretation**

Guha in his seminal texts, presents some core aspects of peasants' lives and how these factors shaped their consciousness and agency. He invented seven key factors for the process of insurgency formation; negation, negative consciousness, ambiguity, modality, solidarity, transmission and territoriality as key factors affecting the peasants' insurgency in South Asia. Similarly, in *History at the Limit of World History*, he finds “history” the product of the ruling ideas. He sees world history as the postcolonial term that ignores the history of the tribes, peasants or Gramscian and Spivakan subalterns. Guha argues that the actual wonder of the peasantry's daily experiences, tribe and other socio-politically subaltern groups were excluded from the writing of history, aka ‘world-history.’

Gramsci argues that the peasants' folk literature, culture and everyday experiences hold the gem of their intelligentsia, consciousness and civility. The issue of territoriality was and is the primary issue of any peasantry or tribal group. Without it, almost the entire history and struggle would have become meaningless. Therefore, the longing for the arbitration of their un-privatization of the ancestral land which was the basis of their survival and collective consciousness, could be noticed in most of their folk literature and performances. Tharu consciousness, agency and insurgency during the Kamaiya practice too emerged from the similar lived experiences that Gramsci, E. P. Thompson, Guha and Guneratne have discussed. This paper discusses the border life of the Tharu community as discussed by William Crooke in his text *The Tribes and Castes of the North Western Province and Oudh*. It



discusses the ideas of promoting the tribal inhabited area as the tribal organic museum to know about their actual lived experiences that could function as an important economic activity for the tribal group making their agency stronger.

The historiography of the community is the conscious historiography of their struggle against oppressive landlordism, semi-feudal taxation, unjust treatment to their subjectship, and physical assault on their and the women of their community's bodies. However, these experiences do not own space in an elaborated mode in any official history except in a few cases where the journals were published either by foreign organizations or the research by French authors Gisele Kauskropff and Pamela Meyers. In the analysis of the early field reports and researches which have often functioned as the primary documentation of the experiences of Tharus of Dang and Chitwan, it could be noticed that the community members have justified their consciousness and identity based on their distinguished cultural practices. The tribal consciousness as Guha argues hovers around their daily lived experiences, regulating and trying to regulate some of their seemingly forgotten practices. In living their practices, when they realise that they have been subject to political miscarriage, they might develop feelings of resistance.

The consciousness of losing their territory and the sovereignty it provided them have ignited their struggles and political movements. To readdress their suffering and compensate for the loss of their land, as Guha argues, the organic lived experiences; and distinct cultural practices should be recorded, made to re-perform and re-inform to the new members of their community. Contradictory to Hegel's arguments, Guha sees no meaning in not writing the history of the *classi subalterne* or the people who are often termed as history-less people as Hegelian notion puts such people at inferiority level who in fact as per him own sort of nothing to be written about or to be designated as people with history as such. Hegel believes that "A people or a nation lacked history, not because they knew no writing but because they had nothing to write about" (Guha 9). However, he does not deny the presence of intelligence in his lived experiences to be written as history. Still, Hegel seems to argue that such groups lack the necessary apparatus to write their history, that is "state." Therefore, the issue

of having one's state that empowers them to write about their experiences makes the primary sense of why the Gramscian *classi subalterne* does not own history.

Again, making judgments from Guhaian perspective, we should understand that he aims to include the wonders of ancient India and its subjects' experiences that have got entangled into the wonderful grand narratives like Mahabharata and Ramayana. Guha, taking reference to ancient Indian storytelling, mythology and Sanskrit, points to the need to write a wonderful history that is eternal and divine. He also differentiates the “World-History” blaming it too lame with data, facts and figures lacking any interest and arousing no further interest after the first reading. Nonetheless, Guha argues that the “re-reading and retelling” inherent quality of great narratives like Ramayan and Mahabharat, which are the actual history of South Asia, holds the spiritual power to regenerate itself and its listeners.

Drawing exactly from the similar arguments of Guha, we find the unwritten history of Tharus without tagging the Kamaiya practice to it. Thus, interpreting the shared lives of different Tharu communities, their history must include their natural life and how they judge their consciousness based on their territoriality, consciousness and folk literature. Guha argues they need an autonomous state. The state means history, and having no history means owning no state. He justifies not the separatist movement but the extended autonomy of sociopolitical power these *classi subalterne* or the peasants and tribes need to write their own experiences, which is more poetic, and rhythmic. According to Hegel, “It is the state which first supplies a content,” he says, “which not only lends itself to the prose of history but actually helps to produce it” (Guha 15). Thus, to sneak through the border of exclusion somehow, they need the recognition of their works of literature as Guha brings the example of Bengali authors *Ramram Basu* and Tagore, whose literatures own the spiritual, poetic and sublime history of the pre-colonized Indian subcontinent.

As per the cultural historian Peter Burke, the conventional interpretation of “people” in Western culture stems from diametrically opposite categories: the impoverished for the wealthy, the clergy for the laity, the commoners for the nobles, and the ignorant for the educated (5-13). Biological

nature shapes the subjectivity of Tharu. They draw great inspiration from nature and ecology for their clothing, food, housing, and cultural practices. According to Mikhail Bakhtin, the body is never fully isolated from its surroundings; rather, it is always impacted by other bodies and outside factors, sometimes even reflecting or translating into them (349). The local ecosystem has influenced their performance, which is closely linked to their way of life. For the residents in the tribal territory, ecotourism frequently generates material benefits as well. Such a business strategy might address health issues, poverty, and low living standards. In a similar case, Davidov Veronica argues that ecotourism profits marginalised subjects from their poverty and exclusion from the global economy (47). Ecotourism should thus be encouraged on tribal grounds to improve their poor quality of living and promote sustainable development.

Vivanco states, “environmental discourse has permitted the authority of indigenous knowledge and practices through green primitivism” (qtd. in Veronica 58). Therefore, autonomy over their ancestral land is necessary to enable tribal groups to use it sustainably. In *Ecotourism and Environmental Sustainability*, Tim Gale and Jennifer Hill provide a novel strategy for preserving the natural world. They argue for banking its parks and natural reserves to foreign organizations supporting developing countries (23). As a subsystem of society, tourism will also change to consider new environmental concerns, ethical standards, and priorities. In nature, everything is related. Nature and its constituent parts are intimately linked to human existence. In *The Ecological Self*, Freya Mathews discusses Newtonian atomism and makes the case that metaphysics and ethics are related since everything is interrelated (44). According to her, every alteration in the natural world should be understood as the separations, affiliations, and movements of these eternal atoms.

The Tharu community often performs their ritual mourning over their traumatic past. They even remember the inhuman killings of their ancestors from state torture and policies. In a similar vein, Casey High contends that local manifestations of cultural identity and social memory are fundamentally shaped by past homicides (723). These incidents represent a grave moral breach connected to their ancestors' agony in the past. The Tharu community still suffers from inadequate

representation at the national and international levels. According to Joseph P. Gone, the state's eviction and enslavement of Indigenous people has left them facing extreme levels of demoralization, suffering, and incapacity (132). Historical trauma ripples through oppressive events and practices.

Tharu community's socio-economic development is hence only possible if they are merged socio-culturally in a dominant group's discourse. However, such unity should function as the building block for the community's mutual growth. According to Austin Sarat's theory on the micropolitics of identity, cultural differences can support and obstruct accomplishments of a way of life (149). Furthermore, it is necessary to reclaim the lost concepts of solidarity and community. Chris Wilson contends against providing regional autonomy to only one tribe, as doing so, there always remains the risk and danger of creating new layers of marginalization, creating autonomous states (73). Tharus often express their socio-cultural history through their performances. In his analysis of the intricate dynamics of group life, Mark F. Ettin contends that the social-political unconscious may be in charge of preserving elements of structural violence, a sense of group cohesion, and background forces that members must navigate (265). In songs of Tharu's performance, the accumulation of painful memories could easily be observed and felt.

In her commentary on the nation's belonging, Smitu Kothari claims that governments and courts continue to use the constitution to defend massive land acquisitions that are purportedly “for the public good” (1476). The lack of the Tharu population in the strong economic zone may be attributed to their antiquated knowledge, which frequently falls short of keeping up with contemporary machines and technological breakthroughs. The protracted relocation process has had far-reaching, traumatizing psychological and sociocultural effects. According to Michael Cernea, forced relocations lead to a vicious cycle of poverty; the community's and each person's cultural identities are upended, greatly increasing physical and mental strain (3661-62). Such displacements affected Tharus disrupting their stable agrarian life, low economic activities and joint family culture.

In his discussion of collective victimization, Felix Mukwiza Ndahinda contends that colonial institutionalization of ethnicity through territorial demarcation and post-colonial exploitation of

ethnic identities by ruthless politicians for personal gain have rendered public institutions, including the judiciary, essentially dysfunctional and that offenders have enjoyed impunity (177). Tharus failed to successfully implement changes to state policies and regulations in the border regions of Nepal and India. In his book *Holy Science*, Banu Subramaniam argues for the return of the native, nation, nature, and postcolonial environmentalism (117). He examines how the Ramayana in modern India forcefully highlights the politics of rescue and return, as well as the strength of nativism. In actuality, Rama's homecoming represents the return of uprooted tribes to their original homeland. In their folk performance, Tharus heavily use nativist vocabulary to advocate for their restoration to their legitimate position inside a democratic nation.

In their consideration of agency, autonomy, and territoriality, Marcela Tovar-Restrepo and Clara Irazabal contend that some types of sociability, agency, and autonomy in the case of indigenous people manifest themselves as a relationship between them and their territories (43). They have access to a variety of resources via agency, such as the ability to make decisions and have their wants and interests met. The Tharu community's demand for self-autonomy over their ancestral territory is fundamental to their struggle for agency. It plays a crucial role in how people establish collective identities, negotiate power, and form perspectives on their world.

### **Ecological Conscience and Kamaiya Life in Tharu Folksongs**

Tharu folk songs frequently highlight the significance of nature in their religion and way of life. In the Ramayan song “Baname Chalatai Dunu Bhai” in Tharu, Rama, Laxman, and Sita are said to subsist on the produce found in the forest. In this song, written and performed by Maniram and Santaram Tharu, Ram and Sita are portrayed as their own gods who, with the aid of trees, managed to endure their banishment:

The Lord Dasharath sobs, beating his chest, and Ram sets out toward Madhuban Woods.

Kaushalya sobs, holding Ram's shoulder, and demands she not leave the castle.

The body without food will rot, and the faker will pass on appetite and thirst.

The semul tree is their home and asylum.

The two siblings might be getting wet under the bell tree. (*Indian bael*)

The hymn mentioned above demonstrates Tharus' belief that nature—including their idol, God Ram—is the ultimate deity for life. Therefore, the explanation of nature's function and strength in preserving human life profoundly represents Tharu subjectivity's biological self. Comparably, in “Maname Sochu Karam Lage Aaj,” one of the songs of Tharu Dhamar, the forlorn and lonely woman tries her hardest to find comfort in the home of nature but is unsuccessful everywhere. She believes that nature is incapable of giving her the necessary remedial measures:

I feel in my heart that if my own karma is cursed, whom should I accuse?

Suffering from pain, I visited the trees, but all their leaves were withered.

What pity the trees could have done to me when my own fate is doomed...

I feel in my heart that if my own karma is cursed, whom should I accuse?

Suffering from pain, I visited the flower garden, but all the flowers had fallen.

What pity the innocent flowers could have done to me when my own karma is doomed.

When the woman goes to see the trees, she discovers that they are suffering from the dry branches in the fall. Their leaves have fallen, and they are unable to offer her any solace or Indigeneity. When she returns to the garden, all she sees is fallen flowers, symbolizing the suffering that childlessness and barrenness have given her. This song recounts the heartbreaking experiences of a lonely, depressed lady who looks to the surroundings and nature for blessings, but nature itself seems to suffer from the barren season and is unable to comfort her:

Try not to slash down these backwoods; the woods give haven to every one of the animals.

At the point when you will go to look for the cool under the tree, the trees may lose their leaves.

At that point, where you get a cool wind, your destiny will be damned.

Don't cut down the forest where the peacock dances.

The streams will go dry, the water source will go dry, and the fields will parch.

There will be extreme heat and heavy rainfall in September.

Similar pleas are made not to harm the jungle in the song “Yee Bana Koina Binasyo” mentioned above. It further warns that if these pleas are disregarded, one would suffer from the heat and severe weather conditions. It alerts us to the devastation of water supplies and the danger of desertification by pointing out that human concern for the preservation of nature is being neglected. Similar to how the devastation of the natural world results in high rainfall, which then produces disasters like landslides and floods:

The mahuwa blossoms sprout and fall in the forest.

The mahuwa blossoms fall in the breeze like water drops.

The young women go to reap them promptly toward the beginning of the day.

The buck and doe live in the forest.

The wild hoard runs fiercely in the wilderness.

The artistic qualities of the jungle and the diversity of nature are similarly conveyed in the song “The Tiger and Tigress are in the Forest.” The song embodies the wild fruit, like mahuwa, which is frequently the community's source of real wine. There is also the statement that human life depends on maintaining the wilderness areas of nature. This is why the song begs to protect the thick forest that encircles the Tharu settlement. Nonetheless, during the Kamaiya ritual, Tharu songs also convey the anguish of their difficult life. The Tharus were subjected to cruel treatment and exploitation under the Kamaiya system. Something like this is mirrored in one of the Tharu Mynah songs:

Oh, Mynah, I worked on the farm as a sharecropper.

Will pay the tax after the cropping and will still be in the same condition.

The kokni (broken rice) will last up to Maghi, and the rice will last only up to Dashain.

I will pack up my belongings and leave for Buhran. Oh Maina I left my father, and I left my mother.

According to the song mentioned above, Kamaiyas were forced to labour for minimum wage while going without enough food, clothes, or housing, which was an exploitative practice. Tharus had already migrated in large numbers from the inner Dang valley to the plains of Tarai to flee such an

agonizing situation. They had to abandon their belongings, their land, and even their elderly mother and father, who were unable to accompany them, as a result of their hurried departure from their homeland:

The labourer woke up in the shivering cold of dusk.

The she-labourer woke up in the early morning to beat the wooden rice grinder.

The tattered blouse and skirt, the worn-out patched shirt

With ups and downs, life passed, digging the watercourse (man-made streams in villages),

The rice flour soup with sinki (gundruk, a preserved fermented vegetable) is one of our delicious dishes.

The sufferings of the kamaiyas are also depicted in the song above. It illustrates how the kamaiya people were compelled to survive on extremely little. To maintain their bondage as exploited labour, they had to get up early despite the chaos of nature and could rarely afford excellent food and nice clothes. Their inability to organize and sustain a powerful opposition was largely due to the living being denigrated:

Had cleared all the jungles in the olden days...

When firewood and fodder became scarce, people thought of saving trees.

In the Kandra River, we catch fish.

Don't mix the poison in the river; it will kill the fish.

Furthermore, Tharu Jhumra songs are frequently regarded as the symbol of the natural world, the people who sing them, and their ecological consciousness. The aforementioned songs contrast and juxtapose the area inhabited by the Tharu with nature. It was formerly the home of plenty, with an abundance of natural resources; but, in the present era, those resources have been depleted and destroyed, negatively affecting them:

The birds sing in the lake Ghorighora. Oh dear, how beautiful the lake looks...

Oh, friends, don't kill the birds of the lake; the lake will become melancholic.

The Gangetic dolphins play in the river Mohana. Oh, friends, how beautiful the lake looks...



Oh, friends, don't fish the jalkapur fish; the dolphins will vanish.

Similarly, in the song "Lake Ghorighora," the earnest appeal has been made not to pollute the lake and river. The song functions as a consciousness campaign, disseminating the importance of preserving the serenity of lake and river water. As the water from these natural resources gets polluted, it will hurt the livelihood of the community. Thus, the songs of the community are a witness to environmental change, ecological diversity, and human effects on nature.

### **Conclusion**

Tharus living at physical and socio-political borders possesses a rich culture, literature, ecological conscience and history. However, the community suffers from economic privilege due to the absence of proficient higher education opportunities, enough employment chances, and inclusive socio-political policies of the state. The state can implement effective economic policies and strategies to develop the entire borderland and the tribe by bringing action such as establishing tribal homestays, eco-resorts, tribal studies, tribal research institutes and projects. Tharus consciousness is directly related to the ethics of their territorial hospitality. The territory has never been just a material object to be exploited and wasted for them. In fact, it was their whole way of life as it produced the primary discourse of their culture and consciousness. Hence, the state can develop their socio-economic status by adhering to their conscience of land hospitality and implementing the new eco-conservation policies. For this, the researchers, the policy makers and the ones who love the tribal lifestyle must understand and feel the narratives of their works of literature; dance songs. The whole must listen to the echoes of their territory that produce the sweet rhythm of their morality, honesty and ecological being.

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## **Ecological Absurdity: A Study of Identity Crisis in Urban Landscapes in Select Works of Harold Pinter and Samuel Beckett**

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**Abstract:** The sensibility or trend of Absurdist Drama was a product of the Second World War, whose horrific events threw the very existence of a healthy environment or humanity into question with the severe environmental degradation caused by numerous dead bodies, smoke, pollution due to weapons and damaging effects of the nuclear bombs. The philosophical concerns of Theatre of the Absurd echo with isolation, human angst, loss of relationships, etc., resulting in an environment of emotional aridity. The loss or destruction highlighted in absurd plays is emotional and ecological in equal measure. This paper discusses the ability of the Theatre of the Absurd to express ecological concerns and environmental anxieties through the plays of Harold Pinter and Samuel Beckett, where depicted landscapes form a bridge between the environment and the psyche of the characters, reflecting their distorted sense of self and identity. Martin Esslin clearly stated that the idea of Absurdity is an ever-evolving concept that remains relevant even in the twenty-first century when the potentially catastrophic environmental crisis is looming large on our planet. For example, the landscape outside the room in Pinter's play *The Room* seems too menacing for the protagonist to step out, no seeds sprout in Beckett's world of *Endgame*, Lucky and Pozzo desperately attempt to grapple with the question of identity and life's purpose on a street i.e. the urban landscape in *Waiting for Godot*. This paper will explore how, in many of the absurd plays, the home and the ecological landscape outside is a space for the negotiation of identities.

**Keywords:** Absurdist Drama, Emotional Aridity, Ecological Concerns, Identity, Environmental Crisis, Urban Landscape

## Introduction

Theatre of the Absurd was a literary movement that became popular after the Second World War. The movement got its name after Martin Esslin's seminal 1961 work *The Theatre of the Absurd*. Esslin defined 'absurd' as "out of harmony with reason or propriety; illogical" (Esslin 23). This movement was heavily influenced by the Existentialist philosophy propounded by Albert Camus in his work *Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), where he describes the figure of Sisyphus from Greek mythology who endlessly tries to push a boulder up a hill, but the boulder keeps rolling back to the bottom. This futile process was a symbol of the aimless existence of human beings, a theme recurrent in Absurdist plays. As Esslin explains:

Theatre of the Absurd strives to express its sense of the senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach by the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought [...] The Theatre of the Absurd has renounced arguing about the absurdity of the human condition; it merely presents it in being—that is, in terms of concrete stage images. (24-25)

Esslin emphasised that absurdity is not an exhaustive or time-bound idea but an ever-evolving concept that remains relevant at every point in time. Moreover, the real significance of absurdity lies away from the shadows of a post-Second World War society. Most of the research related to the Theatre of the Absurd has been confined to existentialist criticism, but interestingly, Absurdist drama has shown environmental anxieties and ecological concerns as well, which is an aspect of absurdity that largely remains unexplored. This ability of Absurdist drama to depict the damaged ecology of the world that we live in, becomes even more important in contemporary times when the potentially catastrophic environmental crisis is looming large on the planet.

Absurdist Drama was a product of the post-World War II society which in itself highlights the movement's intimate connection to environmental concerns. The Second World War witnessed a horrendous amount of damage to the environment with smoke, weapons, nuclear bombs, numerous deaths, ruthless exploitation of resources, an abuse of nature and collapsing properties everywhere;

much of this damage is actually irreparable. The human race was stuck in a society of broken promises, a struggle to make ends meet, a shocking human obsession with violence, a complete breakdown of communication and a broken trust in all societal structures—a world where individuals felt like strangers in their very own lives, bodies and community, they were devastated by this dismantling of a safe living environment.

The absurd nature of the ‘human condition’ that Martin Esslin talked about is heavily influenced by environmental factors as well as the toxic and damaged relationship that exists between nature and humans. This paper focuses on two of the most prominent absurdist playwrights—Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter whose works express ecological concerns through the troubled condition of the individuals within the human society. The selected plays of the two playwrights depict how the characters struggle to find anything to hold onto in life, their inability to come to terms with who they really are and what they can identify with: the outer world or the environmental setup outside the seemingly safer four walls, becomes menacing for the characters and this feeling of being isolated from nature makes their identity crisis even worse. Their troubled psychic spaces mirror the chaotic state of the environment in contemporary times.

The strongest thread that binds Beckett and Pinter’s dramaturgy with ecology is the idea of power. Ecology is not just the study of various elements of nature or the living and non-living components that form the biosphere but the power dynamics that exist between these components. The world has witnessed numerous natural disasters like tsunamis, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, etc., or on a lighter note, the world is full of magnificent wonders; observing the magnanimity of the elements of nature makes one realize how insignificant an individual is in this enormous creation, how trivial we are before the power that nature holds over us. This power dynamic is pivotal to the thematic concerns of these two playwrights—Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter—because both of them emphasize the powerlessness of man against the world, which includes the overwhelming impact of nature on humans. The way humans have endlessly tried to exploit and destroy nature has



made their environment unlivable; this emotion is reflected in their plays through the plight of the characters.

Many critics also suggest that Beckett's and Pinter's characters are actually 'placeless'; they are everywhere and yet nowhere; these individuals fail to communicate with the fast-moving, merciless urban landscape outside their cocoon where they try to find an escape. This makes one question whether we can establish a healthy relationship with the urban landscape where we are situated or does the same landscape further alienates us from our own identity. Thus, is this landscape a threat or a saviour? Furthermore, an analysis of the ecological concerns of the works of Pinter and Beckett would give an insight into how the characters respond and connect to nature in contemporary society and interrogate if they can comprehend what their environment is trying to tell them or expects out of them.

### **Analysis**

The term 'ecology' has a Greek origin: 'oikos' meaning home and 'logos' meaning order or economy. Thus, ecology is not a term that is restricted to an understanding of the ecosystem or the existing connection between humans and nature's elements, but it is necessarily a discourse about what it really means to be home. The purpose of this study is to delve deeper into the relationship between the relatively safer world inside the four walls of a place one may call home and the threatening ruthless world outside i.e. the urban landscape, because the struggle for identity is a tussle between these two spaces. The natural world outside is a threat to the characters as it disturbs their domestic space and distorts their sense of self. Pinter's characters represent the existential dread of modern urban society, its pressures and power dynamics. A recurring absurdist feature of many of Pinter's plays is the attempt of the characters to (re)turn to a place called home; the desperation of the characters to find their identity by coming back 'home' in a physical and metaphorical sense. Pinter's works give the readers and the audiences a deep insight into the helplessness or inability to co-exist with the environment or to operate in their ecological setup, thus highlighting the dependent yet detached and complex relationship between the characters and the landscape around them. It is

interesting to observe that in plays such as *The Birthday Party*, *The Homecoming*, *The Caretaker* or *The Room* and others, Pinter situates his protagonists in a closed space, establishing and perhaps asking the characters to believe that it is their home where they are present physically but struggle to truly belong. *The Room* is set in a stuffy space with a bed and a space with cooking facilities, but even in the stuffed, cramped space, there is a sense of emptiness or rather nothingness, as Esslin would have described. *The Homecoming* plays out in a working-class house of 1960s London. *The Caretaker* takes place in a cramped disorganized house in West London where silence speaks louder than words.

These spaces act like a boundary between what is real and what is made up, between the urban landscape and a concrete domestic safe space, between order and chaos—a landscape and the homescape. Una Chaudhuri theorizes on the way the image of home is built as the focus of two very conflicting impulses firstly the longing to find a place of stability for individual identity and the other is the desire to displace or de-territorialize the self. But the tragedy is that the characters representing the contemporary urban society, neither feel a sense of belongingness inside nor outside. Inside the homescape, they struggle to comprehend what their purpose in life is, how they would operate in this unforgiving world, lamenting for a plethora of things that are now permanently lost to them, whereas the thought of stepping outside only creates fear and insecurity in their minds. It is as if their life would decay into chaos the moment they get out of this homescape; unlike the world outside, this is the place where they feel they can somewhat control their identity, even the angst they feel is bearable inside. Harold Pinter himself stated in an interview taken by Kenneth Tynan in 1960, “(they) are scared of what is outside the room. Outside the room, there is a world bearing upon them which is frightening.”

Pinter shows how the characters feel that the outside world is constantly posing a challenge to them. Some characters even show the will and courage to step outside to face this challenge but are unable to do so, such as the trip to Sidcup that Davies plans to go for multiple times in *The Caretaker* but it's never executed, and Bert from *The Room* aggressively takes out his van to go into

the cold. Stanley from *The Birthday Party* tries to find a home in a strange place, an Inn which in fact, cannot be anybody's home, but he believes that there is 'nowhere' he could go, so he must settle for an artificial home like this; when he is dragged away from Petey and Meg's guest house, Pinter describes it as an "allegory of death" where Stanley is taken away from a place, he wanted to find a home for himself in. In the play *The Room*, the sixty-year-old protagonist Rose Hudd constantly cribs about the cold, harsh and dark 'environment outside and how she wishes to avoid it at all costs, as revealed in the following lines of the play; "It's very cold out. I can tell you. It's murder" (Pinter 90) and about her existential need to always remain within her safe confines, she says, "No this room is alright for me. I mean, you know where you are. When it's cold for instance" (Pinter 91). In *The Homecoming*, as Ruth and Teddy come to Teddy's family home in London from America, Ruth keeps complaining of the arid urban landscape, the harsh weather conditions and the inhospitable sterile environment there as if the American landscape is unsuitable for living altogether, but in this cramped London flat with Teddy's family members, complicated power dynamics along with sexually charged encounters, Ruth strangely feels like home. The way these characters show desperation towards belonging to the 'home' and cling onto the possibility of a homecoming, represents the human struggle of either not being able to survive in the urban landscape or forcibly trying to fit into it, aimlessly looking for their identity as if the home would hand it to them on a platter. This feature of Pinter's theatrical universe echoes with the ideas of homecoming and dwelling which dominated much of ecocritical writing. According to Carl Lavery:

The inside/outside opposition that Pinter postulates is, therefore, something more than a binary; the inside and outside are combined, part of an impossible whole that demands to be written to be examined. These imaginative expressions of environmental agency in his work foreground the disruptive and differential agency of the oikos in the relationships he investigates, as well as suggesting the dissidence against orthodoxy that is to emerge within the characters. (Lavery 227)

The French philosopher Jean Francois Lyotard's famous text *Domus and the Megalopolis* published in 1988, highlights how humans have this tendency to control, tame and metabolize nature for humongous urban structures, so-called modernization and development to further capitalism's agenda which is the root cause of the ecological crisis that humans have landed themselves in; he further states that this mechanical endeavour has resulted in the abandonment and perhaps the destruction of the simple peasant life and the countryside. Lyotard suggests that it is not possible to separate the human from the non-human i.e. nature, they are strongly tied to each other in such a way that the existence of the human depends on the non-human. This anthropological binary intimately ties the human to the destiny and struggle of the planet. Lyotard's idea steers away from the romanticized vision of his predecessors as he states that it is impossible to find any harmony with nature or a stable origin within this natural world. In the context of theatre, this would mean a representation of this detachment or distance that man experiences from the natural world where the stage becomes a space for expressing this strange disorder and chaos that humans find themselves in. This is what one can observe in the works of Pinter as well, where humans make all efforts to tame their environment, the 'home' remains untameable and cannot belong to a single entity—it is everyone's and yet nobody's.

Pinter's understanding of home or homecoming also involves the idea of invasion; one can often see a troublesome element, an unwelcome guest who tries to take control, who tries to disturb the escapist safe space that the characters have created for themselves such as Ruth in *The Homecoming*, who seems to be taking control within a household full of men, Goldberg and McCann from *The Birthday Party* who come to the Inn and aggressively try to dominate and almost threaten Stanley and ultimately drag him out stating that he needs to be 'reintegrated', then Riley in *The Room* who tries to take control over the house that is not his own and finally Davies who invades the uncomfortable silence between the two brothers Mike and Aston in *The Caretaker* and he shows no sign of humility to be given a space that is not his own.

Furthermore, Pinter also represents such characters on stage who are non-natives in the play such as Riley from *The Room*, who is black and rises from the basement of the house. A black

character walks up from the underground as if breaking a societal barrier, disrupting the power structure before him and challenging or rather disturbing the people who claim ownership over a landscape. For a character like Riley, the act of finding a home or feeling at home in an urban landscape holds an entirely different meaning than the other characters. Riley is an outsider in his social environment. His struggle for identity is not the same as others because his battle also involves survival against acts of racial aggression and derogatory remarks or insults from people who claim ownership over the same urban landscape where he is trying to find a strong foothold. Thus, Pinter makes his audience critically think and question what exactly ‘homecoming’ means to an ‘outsider’ like Riley. The fact that he lives in the basement, an underground space, signifies that he does not have a place on the ground, in the heart of the environment, but only somewhere underneath it. Riley constantly persuades Rose to get away from her space and come back ‘home,’ he repeatedly refers to her by a different name ‘Sal’ which seems like an identity abandoned by Rose. One cannot exactly comprehend what Riley means by the term ‘home’ when he wants Rose to return and what role he plays in Rose’s past, a past that Rose does not want to uncover again; Rose is a different being now, she is not Sal as Riley keeps calling her. So Riley is a character who is not only trying hard to establish his own identity and, subsequently his power but also puts Rose and her identity in an extremely vulnerable position while disturbing the little safe space that she has built for herself away from the punishing cold outside. Thus, Pinter also takes into account the loss, displacement, and racial discrimination that builds the idea of ‘home’ for a character and subsequently shapes their identity.

There are only a handful of dramatists who have received the kind of admiration and popularity as Samuel Beckett. Beckett’s name is traditionally associated with the Theatre of the Absurd, but his sensibility has influenced post-war drama beyond this movement and brought revolutionary changes to theatre and its relationship with the audience. His plays loudly echo with existential thoughts, man’s helplessness in a meaningless life and a mechanical world— “Recognize! What is there to recognize? All my lousy life I've crawled about in the mud! And you talk to me about scenery! (Looking wildly about him.) Look at this muckheap! . . . You and your landscapes!” (Beckett

39). The lines are from *Waiting for Godot*, a play that established Samuel Beckett as one of the most significant figures of post-war theatre; someone who quickly grabbed the attention of theatregoers, critics and scholars alike with his unique stage aesthetics and his commentary on the human condition. Beckett's works not only set an important benchmark for Absurdist Theatre but also changed the face of contemporary theatre forever. It is interesting to observe that Beckett spent most part of his career and life away from Ireland but the Irishness of his writing and sensibility reaches out to his readers and audiences- whether it was the country road with the leafless tree in *Waiting for Godot*, the post-apocalyptic desert-like setting of *Happy Days*, the desert lit up by 'dazzling light' in *Act Without Words*, all show glimpses of the Irish landscape. Also, Beckett's settings mirror the state of mind of the characters and the post-war society. The Irish landscape finds a place in his works, sometimes as a mental space or as a window to the scary urban landscape or perhaps Beckett uses the Irish homeland to reinforce his idea of being nowhere, the inability to find firm ground in this society.

The audience is always aware that stage settings are artificial and all the props are made up but in Beckett's plays, the stage setting is as integral to the plot and theme as any other character. Stage settings depicting nature may appear weather-less, resistant to any and every change but Beckett's landscape undergoes its own arc through the course of the play. A huge part of the impact that *Waiting for Godot* creates on the audience comes from the country road and the leafless tree; the growth of the few leaves on that tree towards the second half of the play shows that Beckett's landscape is not stagnant and weather-less, it is as realistic as the characters and their plight. If one thinks of this landscape in the current social context, perhaps the country road would not be so empty. One never knows if the tree (even though leafless) would find a place in the current urban landscape or not. Perhaps it would be a road where someone or the other is always coming or going, a never-ending string of people, but the larger existential question would remain the same- will Godot ever come? Vladimir and Estragon of the twenty-first century would be full of the same angst and purposelessness as the Gogo and Didi of the 1950s, and the fast-paced life of the current times would leave no scope for contemplation about the aim or purpose of life. This situation says a lot about the

environmental changes or, rather the environmental crisis that looms large in the current times. This section will critically analyze two of Beckett's most popular plays: *Endgame* and *Waiting for Godot*. The play *Waiting for Godot* takes place on an isolated road with a lifeless tree with the two central characters Vladimir and Estragon, who are later joined by Lucky and Pozzo. Here, Godot is a symbol of some higher power, and the two central characters, Vladimir and Estragon, wait for him, hoping that he would bring meaning to their lives and answer their existential crisis; he would probably help them find an identity of their own. The tree on the lonely road is the only organic element of an urban setting, but it is shown as dormant and dead; the second act even shows a few leaves on the tree when Vladimir and Estragon are engaged in at least some substantial action in the play even if it is meaningless banter. The lifelessness of the tree not just mirrors but also empathizes with the purposelessness and meaninglessness of life, which the characters constantly struggle to cope with. *Waiting for Godot* has largely been understood as a play with a tone of complete hopelessness which it very rightly is, but every now and then there is either a distraction or a make-believe element that saves the characters from slipping into a state of absolute nothingness as depicted in the following lines from the play: "But at this place, at this moment of time, all mankind is us, whether we like it or not. Let us make the most of it, before it is too late! [...] We should turn resolutely towards Nature" (Beckett 71).

The setting of *Endgame* is a small room located at the very 'end of all civilization' often described as an apocalyptic wasteland. Here, Beckett has deliberately used the setting of a room, a place where nature is absent, perhaps to show how unrepresentable the urban landscape has become; some critics suggest that it represents the anticipation of a gloomy future tormented by extreme global warming and irreversible environmental damage. Thus, the urban landscape comprising just a room gives an insight into the dying relationship between humans and the environment. The characters Nagg and Nell are depicted to be trapped inside waste baskets where sawdust seems to be their sole comfort, highlighting the ill effects of rapid technological advancement, industrial development, and increased production of waste. Through this play, Beckett shows us what it means to live in a world

without nature, where the environment is in ruins. Perhaps this setting represents Beckett's concern and prediction for the future of the planet where there is no nature to offer a sense of comfort, peace, or tranquillity, just a lifeless, damaged post-catastrophe society.

The process of coping with a modern urban life resulted in the abandonment of nature, as if the only world that matters is the human world. This indicates the way humans have somewhat forgotten the significance of nature or perhaps ignored its cries for too long. The urban landscape is as broken, as deformed, as damaged, and as barren as human life and their identity. According to Carl Lavery:

In Beckett's hands, theatre is no longer a space where the essence of the human appears; on the contrary, it is a site where the human dis-appears [...] To be a spectator at a Beckett play is to find oneself overwhelmed by the shimmering presence of a strange and estranging world, a world that no longer makes linguistic sense, and where the dangerous binary between 'nature' and culture is troubled, without, for all that, ever being dissolved completely. (3)

## **Conclusion**

On one hand, Beckett makes direct references to the natural environment and even makes nature part of his stage setup as if nature itself is a character in the play while Harold Pinter understands ecology as an act of homecoming, both geographical and emotional; he connects this constant desire of belongingness in a home to the urban social environment. However, the most significant similarity between their concerns is the issue of identity faced by their subjects placed in the urban landscape and a sense of hope. The characters are in a constant state of helplessness, struggle, insecurity, and fear as they grapple with the question of their identity. Practitioners and critics of Theatre of the Absurd initially stated that the movement is strictly apolitical and even the playwrights did not directly indulge in any political commentary in their plays, even though the movement was a product of one of the biggest political events of history i.e. the Second World War. However, as one analyses the ecological concerns of Absurdist drama in Beckett and Pinter's works, it becomes interesting to observe that the urban landscape of which these characters are a part, cannot be looked at in isolation



without considering the politics of it. It is this same landscape, along with its politics, that shapes the lives of these individuals and affects their relationships with society.

In the case of Pinter's body of work, it will not be wrong to say that there is a recurring battle over the possibility of what a home means, and he brilliantly delves deeper into the way ecology can also be a threat which troubles the characters when they are forcibly denied the comfort of a home or try to unnaturally or unethically fit into a home. Ultimately, it is the individual whose position within society is a complex riddle that these characters attempt to solve. To say that the angst, dilemma, aimlessness and lack of harmony that Beckett and Pinter's characters face is only because of issues like class, financial crunch, or social status would oversimplify their condition; what reaches out to the readers and the audiences is a very deep sense of inferiority and powerlessness against everything because of which survival within the society and the act of holding onto their identity, becomes a challenge to them.

Beckett and Pinter's works are rooted in the urban city life set in the heart of the urban landscape, a locale that has traditionally been understood as a sight for emotional bareness, crime, mechanized lifestyle, immorality, and a draining struggle to fit in. All these issues are experienced by Beckett and Pinter's subjects in full force. Thus, the urban landscape is not presented as a world of modernity, progress, or advancement but a place of constant identity crisis where individuals fail to cope, communicate, form meaningful relationships, or find meaning within their lives. The idea of ecology is understood and expressed by both these playwrights in very different ways. An important argument that arises out of Beckett and Pinter's depiction of nature is whether nature is a place where the human appears or is it a place where the human disappears. It is in this estranged world which is devoid of any linguistic sense, that the relationship between nature and humans is problematized.

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## **Exploring Human-Tree Interconnectedness in Sumana Roy's *How I Became a Tree*: An Ecocritical Analysis**

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**Abstract:** The intricate connection between humans and nature is a fundamental aspect of existence, shaping cultures, beliefs, and lifestyles. This relationship, characterized by interdependence and symbiosis, is crucial for the psychological, emotional, and physical well-being of individuals. This connection reveals how natural environments foster a sense of peace, enhance creativity, and promote well-being. Conversely, humans impact the natural world through their activities, necessitating a balance to ensure sustainability. In the new age literary theory, ecocriticism has found a prominent place in literature, examining and exploring the link between nature and man. Ecocriticism pleads for a better understanding of nature, and it both interprets and represents the natural world. One such natural entity is a tree. Trees have been significant motifs in literature. They have been symbols of fertility and growth, strength and endurance and renewal and regeneration. Many literary texts show an intimate connection between a human being and a tree. The present paper explores one such human-tree interconnectedness through the lens of ecocriticism in a non-fictional text, *How I became a Tree* by Sumana Roy. This analysis delves into Roy's narrative, where she metaphorically and literally aspires to embody the qualities of a tree, seeking solace from the frenetic pace of modern life. Through literary and philosophical reflections, Roy elucidates her symbolic metamorphosis into a tree, thus highlighting the highest form of interconnectedness where one form merges into the other.

**Keywords:** Ecocriticism, Interconnectedness, Metamorphosis, Sustainability, Trees

There has been a connection between human beings and natural world since time immemorial. This connection characterized by interdependence, mutual influence and symbiosis, is crucial for the psychological, emotional, and physical well-being of individuals. This connection reveals how

natural environments foster a sense of peace, enhance creativity, and promote good health. Conversely, humans impact the natural world through their activities, necessitating a balance to ensure sustainability. In the new age literary theory, ecocriticism examines the relationship between literature and the environment. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of all living beings and the importance of understanding and preserving the natural world. According to Greg Garrard, the eminent professor of environmental humanities, “The widest definition of the subject of ecocriticism is the study of the relationship of the human and the non-human, throughout human cultural history and entailing critical analysis of the term ‘human’” (5). It was in the year 1978 that William Rueckert used the term ecocriticism in the essay, “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism.” However, the definition of ecocriticism is credited to the book, *The Ecocritical Reader* written by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. According to Glotfelty, ecocriticism in terms of literature is defined as follows:

Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies. (xviii)

The eco-centric reading focuses on the outside, the house and its environs, rather than the inside. It uses the ideas of energy that is entropy, which is a kind of negative energy within systems which tends towards breakdown and disorganization and that of symbiosis, a living together, co-existing, and mutually sustaining systems.

Ecocriticism has deep roots and within its ambit lays everything related to natural resources like the earth, sky, water, mountains and trees. In the words of William Howarth, “Ecocriticism observes in nature and culture the ubiquity of signs, indicators of value that shape form and meaning. Ecology leads us to recognize that life speaks, communing through encoded streams of information that have direction and purpose, if we learn to translate the messages with fidelity” (76-77). Unlike

most other theories, ecocriticism rejects the view that everything is socially or linguistically constructed. In this connection, Peter Barry's observation is significant:

For the ecocritic, nature really exists, out there beyond ourselves, and not needing to be ironised as a concept by enclosure within knowing inverted commas, but actually present as an entity which affects us and which we can affect, perhaps fatally, if we mistreat it. Nature, then, isn't reducible to a concept which we conceive as part of our cultural practice .... Theory in general tends to see our external world as socially and linguistically constructed, as 'always already textualized into 'discourse', but ecocriticism calls this longstanding theoretical orthodoxy into question .... (243)

Antony Giddens advocates more caring attitude towards the environment which can make a human being the steward of nature. This attitude has led to the concept of deep ecology as formulated by Arne Naess. Deep ecology believes in the fundamental interconnectedness of all life forms and natural features. Naess suggests shifting the anthropological view to the ecological view.

Talking specifically about trees, they have been significant motifs in literature. They have been symbols of fertility and growth, strength and endurance and renewal as well as regeneration. There is a kind of organic kinship that exists between humans and trees, communicating with and sustaining each other. As stated by Solvejg Nitzke in his research article:

Trees and humans are part of a long and complicated relationship. On the one hand, humans not only value trees for their wood, which literally shelters, fuels and furnishes human lives, they also admire and worship arboreal beings for their height, connected-ness, and longevity .... Yet, the relationship between trees and humans exceeds the dimension of the practical: Forests and trees capture human imagination, whether as a thought or a symbol, an actual tree, or a metaphor .... The tradition of humans fashioning themselves after trees and vice versa reaches back millennia. Despite this long tradition, trees have been marginalised in literary and cultural studies as 'just' motifs or symbols, that is, as something, which stands for human interests and stories, not for themselves. (Nitzke 341)

Sumana Roy's *How I became a Tree* is a path-breaking non-fictional work wherein the author literally as well as metaphorically aspires to embody the qualities of a tree, seeking solace from the frenetic pace of modern life. Through literary and philosophical reflections, Roy elucidates her symbolic metamorphosis into a tree. Roy wishes to become a tree or treelike. Her desire to metamorphose into plant life symbolizes a return to a more harmonious and sustainable way of living. In the words of Mathew Hall in his book, *Plants as Persons: A Philosophical Botany*, "The notions of plant personhood and human-plant kinship are expressed in stories, poems, and myths. Common expressions of personhood and kinship are metamorphoses from human form to plant form" (11-12). As observed by Alberto Baracco, "In regard to the human-tree relation, since ancient times, the tree has long been a symbol of life and the perennial cyclicality of nature. As a connecting element between earth and sky, bringing together materiality and spirituality, the tree has been the fulcrum of myths and narratives and also a recurring element in philosophical reflection. The tree, in fact, has been considered an element for understanding nature and the human being" (255-56). By blending personal narrative, literary reflection, and botanical insight, Sumana Roy creates a rich mosaic that highlights the deep connections between humans and the natural world. As articulated by Anirban Bhattacharjee in his book review, Roy's work:

... a *mélange* of memoir, music, spiritual philosophies, phyto-literature, and botanical studies, is a risky body-writing that opens the self toward the other to measure out the author's (own) capacity to respond to the call of the other, as she, as if, or in a keen sense, literally and textually, breast-feeds the non-human non-animal plants/trees, an intimate and unsettling *samjoga* (contact) that blurs the borders between the bodies. (78-79)

The paper is an attempt to offer a profound exploration of human-tree interconnectedness where one form merges into the other. Roy is not the first one to talk about such human-tree inter-connectedness. In ancient Greek philosophy there has been a relation between human beings and trees, often on the basis of a supposed analogy of their biological processes. In this regard, the concept of the 'arbor inversa' propounded by Plato in the *Timaeus* is important. Plato argued that the human being is a

celestial plant, an upside-down tree whose roots extend into the sky and whose branches descend into the earth. According to the Hindu philosophy, the world is like an inverted *peepal* tree. With regard to contemporary philosophy of Martin Buber, the tree is human being's direct interlocutor. According to Buber's dialogical philosophy, the tree is a 'Thou' in relation to which it is possible to say the 'I,' through a dialogue that allows human beings to rediscover their genuine nature. From a similar perspective, Hermann Hesse observes, "Trees are sanctuaries. Whoever knows how to speak to them, whoever knows how to listen to them, can learn the truth" (52).

Several works of fiction have tried to explore this quintessential relationship between a human and a tree. The 2019 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by the American novelist Richard Powers, *The Overstory*, is one such eco-fiction. The novel is divided into four sections, titled "roots," "trunk," "crown," and "seeds" reflecting the structure of a tree. The human characters in this novel begin to hear the utterances of trees, often as eloquent statements addressed directly to them. One of the central characters in the novel, Patricia Westerford, a tree scientist, articulates:

We scientists are taught never to look for ourselves in other species. So, we make sure nothing looks like us! Until a short while ago, we didn't even let chimpanzees have consciousness, let alone dogs or dolphins.... But believe me: trees want something from us, just as we've always wanted things from them. This isn't mystical. The "environment" is alive—a fluid, changing web of purposeful lives dependent on each other. (Powers 453–54).

The novel undoubtedly talks about the human-tree symbiotic relationship, "The novel offers a fictional reflection on new modes of cross-species understanding by placing its human characters at the margins and in milieux where other species share the same medium and invite them to consort with their symbiotic neighbors" (Clarke 128).

Sumana Roy elucidates the human-tree interconnectedness by viewing trees as parent (mother), children, lover and even a spouse and validates her thoughts by quoting from a number of literati, botanists, film makers and many more. Talking about tree as mother, Roy narrates a Bengali story "The Giving Tree" written by Narayan Sanyal. In the story, a little boy grew up in the loving



canopy of a mango tree, “A little boy loves the mango tree and grows up playing with it- making crown of fallen mango leaves ... swinging on its branches, climbing up its trunk, feeding on its mangoes...” (Roy 218). The tree was like a mother to him- caring and giving. However, when the boy became a little older, he left the place in search of greener pastures. He was missed by the “Tree Mother” (218) and then one fine day he returned and demanded money from the mango tree. The tree mother asked him to collect all her mangoes and sell in the market. The young man got the money he desired and went away again only to return years later in search of more money. The tree mother asked him to chop off her branches and to sell the timber. His needs were again satisfied and again many years passed. The man, aged now, returned again and demanded more money. The tree mother asked him to cut off her trunk and sell it off. The man did the same without any sense of guilt or shame. Through this story, Roy highlights the giving nature of a tree just as a mother who sacrifices her life so that the children might live. She also hints towards barbaric human nature that mercilessly kills trees for selfish gains, committing “one of the most abominable crimes” (219) of killing one’s own mother, thus disturbing the ecological balance. Personally, Roy regards a papaya tree growing outside her bedroom as a mother, “It is like a mother to me- I take it for granted like I do my mother” (220), and pays due respect and homage to it.

Conversely, Sumana Roy talks about trees as children. Personally, she views all plants as her children, “... the parenting I had chosen was in no way inferior to the production of human children ...” (121). She is repulsed with the idea of vegetarianism- to consume the very plants she had watered and cared for like a mother, “But my plants? My tiny kitchen garden with its enthusiastic sprouting of herbs was specifically meant for indulging the tongue” (122). When Roy suffers from a low haemoglobin count and goes to see a doctor, she comes across a son donating blood to his ailing mother. She wonders if this kind of thing is possible with her plant children, “Was such reciprocity ever possible in the monologous relationship I shared with my plants? I had given them care, attention, affection, water, everything except sunlight .... Could they not give me blood when I needed it most?” (122). Interestingly, a plant comes to her rescue that is to be boiled and consumed as a concoction, a

spoonful every day to cure her of her anemia, “Green to red, chlorophyll to blood” (123). The plants prove to be her true children. In the text, she also alludes to the great botanist from India, Sir Jagdish Chandra Bose who also viewed plants as children. She is joyful on this revelation and thus reflects:

One can only estimate my joy in becoming aware of these comparisons, not just his thinking of plants as his human children but also the easy fluidity with which he saw the workings of two seemingly very different species, the plant and the human .... There is no more difficulty in understanding this process .... We may thus regard the channels of the ascent of sap in the plant as a sort of diffuse heart. He [Bose] notes the similarities between the human response to light and compares it immediately with the plant- light is food for both ... (132)

Roy asserts that “To read Bose, to live like him, is to become aware of a liberating sense of life where one can be plant and human at the same time” (132). Taking the human-tree interconnectedness to yet another level, Roy talks about tree as lover/ beloved or a spouse. She mentions a poem, “Boyfriend like a Banyan Tree” where a woman tired of human lovers desires a banyan tree as her lover. Roy also mentions noted filmmaker Aparna Sen’s movie, “*Sati*” where banyan tree is first a lover to a lonely woman and then a husband, “Uma, lonely and unloved, finds companionship in the unspoken love of the banyan tree to which she is eventually married off” (108). Roy mentions another interesting story, “The Tree” written by Adrienne Lang, “Lang’s story that had first got me interested in her held in it some of my natural insecurities as a lover. A woman comes home to find that her boyfriend has turned into a tree ... into a fig tree” (109). Taking cue from the real-life incidents, Roy narrates the story of Emma McCabe from United Kingdom. McCabe fell in love with a tree she called Tim and even wanted to marry him. Roy also quotes Peruvian actor, Richard Torres who married a tree in the year 2013. However, such companionship is criticized and considered queer by the society at large. Roy remarks, “The imagined reactions of families to such a relationship bothered me .... No matter how moral and utilitarian the nature of the tree-human relationship, a romance between the two would be considered outrageous” (117).

Roy becomes acutely aware of the similarities between a tree and a human being. Both age with time but while humans believe in hiding their age, trees age with grace:

Age, I was certain, was important to trees. The wrinkles on our face and neck, the accumulation of folds around hips and thighs had, civilizationally, become embarrassing to humans. The age of trees was to be found in similar lines, in circles denoting lived years, in the girth of time that gave aged trees a kind of sober dignity. (5-6)

Roy is acutely aware of the advantages trees have over humans in terms of freedom from sham and patriarchy, "I loved the way in which trees coped with dark and lonely places .... I liked too how trees thrived on things that were still freely available" (Roy 3). She is also aware of the human shortcoming of being pressed with a tight time schedule. She desires to be a tree to have a "Tree Time" (4) and be liberated in mind and spirit, "... when I look back at the reasons for my disaffection with being a human, and my desire to become a tree, I can see that at root lay the feeling that I was being bulldozed by time .... I was tired of speed. I wanted to live to tree time" (3-4).

Finding trees much better than humans, Roy dreams of metamorphosing into a tree, thus taking the human-tree interconnectedness to the highest level. In fact, metamorphosis is an illustrative literary convention that crosses the entire history of human thought. Examples of this form of representation can be found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* with Daphne, who transforms into a laurel tree, or Philemon and Baucis, who are transformed into an oak and a linden. Roy wants to do the same and transform into an *Ashoka* tree, "I'd chose to be an Ashoka, the a-shoka, the sorrowless tree, I decide" (221), and thus, articulates:

I liked what I thought was the restraint in plants .... There was no gluttony, no anorexia ... and so they suffered neither from obesity nor malnutrition. In plant economics, need and want are one and the same thing, unlike in the human world where wants had the character of a capitalist bulldozer whose actions could be justified through the prettified word 'desire'. And so, there was no envy, the by-product of this gap between I-want and She-has-it .... I wanted that

confidence of a tree, the complete rejection of all that made humans feel inferior or superior.

(11-12)

Roy is also tired of the exhibition of 'relationship status' by the humans. She finds trees free from this tendency to show-off and thus wants to be like them, "Trees wore no relationship uniform, one could not look at a tree and declare whether it was happily married or that it had got recently divorced, whether it was a widow or single. I longed to become this, liberated of identity tags" (12). And then she felt she had started becoming a tree or had already become one:

Nothing about my human structure seemed precious to me .... In my head, my two hands, two feet, two shoulders, all of these pairs were broken to create- fit into- a trunk from which smaller branches emanated. The smallest of twigs I conjured out of an assemblage of my little fingers.

It was not difficult to imagine skin as bark. (220-221)

The same thought is propounded in the novel, *The Vegetarian* by the nobel laureate Korean writer, Han Kang. The novel presents a female protagonist, Yeong-hye who sees herself as a tree or wishes to become a tree that would require only air, water and sunlight to survive. The novel narrates the story of her becoming a vegetarian due to the trauma she experienced in her childhood and her dreams about the atrocities committed by humans against animals. Her vegetarianism goads her to be one with the flora and thus she decides to become a tree. Her idea to transform into a tree is also supported by her dream, "In the dream, she saw herself converted into a tree. Leaves and roots grow from her body. She also wants to have flowers to bloom from her genitals. The dream further solidifies the idea to withdraw herself from reality and reshape herself into a tree" (Ningtyas 171). Eventually, she declares that she is no longer a human, "I don't need to eat, not now. I can live without it. All I need is sunlight" (Kang 159). Sumana Roy in *How I Became a Tree* also declares to have become a tree, "... a bird came and sat on my shoulder around sunset one day. I did not move ... but I was certain that ... I was, at last, ready to be tree" (Roy 222). Her metamorphosis becomes complete, "In more recent times, the term metamorphosis has often been supplanted in philosophy and academic literature by the ubiquitous term 'becoming'" (Perkins 4).

A 2013 Italian movie called *Alberi* by Michelangelo Frammartino also draws upon the similar concept. The movie is based on the ancient Lucanian tradition where Romito, a man who transforms into a tree, rejects the idea of migration and plants his roots in his own land:

As a representation of human-tree metamorphosis, the Lucanian romito is linked to other ancient rites and traditions, such as the medieval homo selvaticus and the Celtic green man, and reminds us of other artistic representations, including the walking forest of the Shakespearean *Macbeth* or the Treebeard and the other Ents of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. (Baracco 255)

The film transforms it into a collective rite and the single romito is replaced by hundred such tree-men who, after their transformations, go in procession toward the center of the village which symbolically becomes a human forest. According to the filmmaker himself the metamorphoses is “an attempt to eliminate boundaries, break the distance between human beings and landscape so that they merge into one another (256) and further that, “The centrality of the human must be dismantled ... it is this human arrogance that must be rejected, not to lose the human being, but to relocate it as a presence among other presences” (260).

*How I Became a Tree* undoubtedly serves as a call for greater ecological awareness and responsibility. By highlighting the interconnectedness of humans and trees and the metamorphosis from human to trees, Roy underscores the need for exiting anthropocene and embracing symbiocene. In the words of Rini Barman:

*How I Became a Tree* brings opposites together—and does a fantastic job of striking a common chord among disciplines and among all plant life. This is a unique bouquet of suppressed or overlooked narratives about plants. It subsequently branches out and becomes an ode to *all* that is unnoticed, ill, neglected and yet resilient. As I turned the last leaf of this book, it almost felt like I too was planting a small healing tree within me.

The book seems to profess that the more we would be treelike, the more we would make this world a place worth living. As stated by Jon M. Sweeney, “The takeaway from *How I Became a Tree* might

simply be: We would all do well by ourselves and for the world if we lived more like plants.” It would lead to sustainable living practices and hence, environmental conservation.

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## **Reclaiming Identity and Nature: A Feminist Ecocritical Reading of Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing***

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the protagonist's interaction as well as its relationship with nature in Margaret Atwood's novel and its adaptation of the same name, *Surfacing*. The protagonist's return to her childhood island which signifies a reconnection with nature. This journey symbolises her attempt to reclaim her identity and roots. The protagonist's growing awareness of ecological degradation and her rejection of modern, consumerist society aligns with ecocritical concerns.

The paper touches upon themes of dualities and contradictions, revealing inconsistencies in the protagonist's personal life and the patriarchal society. Moreover, on a larger scale, it highlights the conflict between human society and nature. The paper also explores the theme of domination and oppression, which elaborates and analyses the author's language, events and characters in the novel, reflecting the oppression of femininity and nature and how the novel critiques the patriarchal system that dominates and marginalises women and nature.

The paper also highlights how both animals and women are marginalised and violated by a male-dominated, consumerist society. Both groups face threats of consumption and exploitation, deprived of their rights to live freely and independently. Atwood's novels explore these themes by drawing parallels between women and animals, highlighting their oppression.

The paper delves into the protagonist's psychological journey, which involves questioning and deconstructing her identity, reflecting postmodern themes of fragmented and fluid selves. The novel rejects traditional, patriarchal narratives about identity and truth, embracing ambiguity and multiplicity. The protagonist's shifting perceptions of reality and her eventual immersion into the natural world illustrate the postmodern blurring of boundaries between self and environment.

**Keywords:** Identity, Canadian Wilderness, Enlightenment, Postmodern Self, Other, Binaries



Anything that suffers and dies instead of us is Christ; if they didn't kill birds and fish they would have killed us. The animals die that we may live, they are substitute people, hunters in the fall killing the deer, that is Christ also. And we eat them, out of cans or otherwise; we are eaters of death, dead Christ-flesh resurrecting inside us, granting us life. Canned Spam, canned Jesus, even the plants must be Christ.

*Surfacing*, Margaret Atwood

This quote critiques the commodification of life and death. It challenges the reader to reflect on how humans have distanced themselves from the natural processes of death and sacrifice, reducing them to consumable goods and products. It also highlights the interconnectedness between human existence, nature, and spirituality, suggesting that modern life requires the death of other beings (animals, plants) for human survival, turning even the most sacred symbols (like Christ) into consumable, lifeless things. The novel *Surfacing* maps a similar journey. The protagonist's return to her childhood island in the novel, which symbolises the protagonist's desire to reconnect with her roots that are both personal and ecological. Her home island represents a place of purity, untouched by modern society and its capitalist regime, where she finds space and a place to rediscover her authentic self, free from external pressures. This journey mirrors the protagonist's attempt to reclaim her lost identity by returning to a more primal and uncorrupted state of being. This paper attempts to understand the protagonist's journey which isn't just a physical return to her childhood island but is also an existential one that is deeply intertwined with postmodern ideas of fragmented identity.

In her book *Women and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*, Susan Griffin deepens the exploration of the interconnectedness between women and nature and she critiques the patriarchal structures that perpetuate women's marginalisation. Griffin contends that women's connection to nature is often appropriated by patriarchal narratives, which cast them as passive, nurturing, and subservient and parallels are often drawn between women's bodies and the earth. She critiques this appropriation, advocating instead for a reclamation of this bond in a way that empowers women to

resist oppression and redefine their roles outside patriarchal expectations. By aligning the struggles of women with those of nature, Griffin calls for a feminist ecocritical perspective that rethinks the treatment of both, challenging destructive hierarchies and promoting a more equitable, symbiotic relationship (Griffin 2016). Griffin's discussion resonates with that of Atwood and her novel *Surfacing*. Both Griffin and Atwood call for a re-evaluation of societal norms that uphold destructive binaries and emphasise more on the need to embrace emotional, historical and ecological dimensions of existence. This attempt by both authors advocates for a more integrated understanding of identity that recognises the shared struggles of women and the environment which this ultimately promotes an important vision of liberation that transcends traditional boundaries. This paper also reflects on the approaches and ideas which Atwood highlights in her novel like the relationship between nature and gender and simultaneously calls for a collective responsibility towards healing and reclaiming agency in the face of systemic oppression.

The blurring of boundaries between the self and the environment is shown in several ways in the novel *Surfacing*, which draws several tangents on its circumference like the themes of identity, interconnectedness and the embodied experiences of the protagonist. This underlines an important inference for readers to consider about identity that how individual identity is shaped by and is inseparable from the surrounding natural world.

It is found that throughout the novel the protagonist sheds multiple layers of the self that she has curated and wears each day that were imposed upon her mind and body by society, patriarchy as well as her relationships. Initially it is found that the protagonist i.e. the unnamed narrator of the novel *Surfacing* carries many narratives about herself for example a narrative of a daughter, a victim of patriarchal oppression, a mother who aborted her child, a lover and even of a passive member of society she lives in. It is important to notice that as she enters the Canadian wilderness, she symbolically rejects these many narratives of the self by removing her clothes and confronting her raw, naked self, seeking an authentic connection to both nature and her inner being. This transformation underpins the postmodernist concept of the self as fluid, where identity is never fixed

but constantly in flux, a cyclical process of continuous deconstruction and reconstruction. Additionally, this also frames the protagonist's journey within the context of Canadian identity, particularly through postcolonial lens. Scholars like Laura Moss argues that Canada despite of being perceived a developed nation, is still negotiating its identity very much like other postcolonial countries that struggle with the vestiges of the British imperialism. The novel also not only critiques patriarchy but also cultural imperialism that can be understood especially by studying the tension between American consumerism and Canadian wilderness. The protagonist's growing realization that, just like the Americans whom she criticises, she too is implicated in the colonisation and exploitation of the land. In this particular light the novel successfully conveys a deep unease about the effects of cultural imperialism and environmental destruction, questioning the protagonist's own complicity in these dynamics.

Understanding this theme through the lens of Canada's postcolonial history interestingly deepens this analysis. Canada's past is characterised by the domination of Indigenous people and the exploitation of natural resources by European settlers. The binary oppositions of coloniser/colonised and male/female are central to this historical narrative, as each pair positions one side as superior to the Other. This dynamic is reflected in the protagonist's personal struggles and her efforts to reclaim her identity in a world defined by such inequalities. The theme of domination is not just an individual experience but is rooted in the broader historical context that informs contemporary Canadian identity.

In her quest for identity the protagonist dismantles the personal and gendered binaries along with the larger power dynamics of the coloniser versus the colonised, victim versus the oppressor. Drawing from Spivak's concept of the "subaltern" and her critique of the inability of the marginalised voices to be heard within the framework of colonial power structures, highlights how the protagonist grapples with her own complicity, her agency and her voice (Spivak). Spivak's notion of the subaltern not being able to speak resonates with the protagonist's struggle to articulate a new identity beyond the binaries, expectations and imposed idealistic frameworks. This very deconstruction of the power

dynamics can be sensed when the narrator-protagonist states, that she is with each passing day becoming more and more like a dead person. This mirrors Spivak's critical theory on the entangled and often invisible dynamics between the oppressor and the oppressed. Spivak argues that subjects within oppressive systems are always implicated in those very structures, making total resistance impossible without self-erasure. Becoming like a dead person reflects the paradox of resistance—one must recognize their complicity in the system while refusing to fully submit to it. This echoes Spivak's idea that even the most marginalized voices (e.g., the subaltern) struggle to speak outside the dominant discourse, as their agency is always mediated by the structures that silence them.

The novel also critiques the traditional binary that positions nature as "other" to human civilization, a concept rooted in Enlightenment thought where humans are seen as separate from and superior to the natural world. In *Surfacing*, this binary is deconstructed as the protagonist comes to realize that the idea of humanity's separation from nature is a false construct, one imposed by the same patriarchal and colonial systems that seek to dominate both women and the environment. Nature in the novel is not something to be conquered or tamed, but something with which the protagonist must reconcile, both externally and internally. Her eventual immersion into the wilderness, particularly her naked return to a primal state, symbolises her rejection of these human/non-human distinction.

It also simultaneously pinpoints the fact how the protagonist must first dismantle her identity shaped by these binaries before she can achieve a true authentic sense of self. Atwood's use of the wilderness as a liminal space (Bhabha) where distinctions between man and nature, male and female, self and other blur, and which allows her to break free from the rigid expectations and definitions and move forward towards embracing a more dynamic, interconnected understanding of herself and her place in the world.

Homi K. Bhabha's concept of "liminal space" is particularly relevant to understanding how *Surfacing* navigates these themes. The narrator's journey into the wilderness represents a movement into a liminal space—one that exists between the binary oppositions of civilization and nature, self

and other, male and female. This space is not merely a physical transition; it is also a metaphorical journey toward self-discovery and reclamation of agency. It is within this interstitial zone that the protagonist confronts the contradictions and complexities of her identity. The liminal space allows for the negotiation of identities and experiences that cannot be easily categorised, challenging the simplistic binaries that dominate both personal and national narratives.

Furthermore, the literal setting of the novel, situated on the border between Ontario and Quebec, serves to destabilise the notion of a unified Canadian identity. This geographical liminality reflects the larger cultural and historical tensions present in Canada, where various identities intersect and challenge colonial narratives. The protagonist's experiences in this borderland illuminate the complexities of her identity as a woman and as a Canadian, forcing her to confront the historical legacies of domination that shape her understanding of self.

The novel reflects ecocritical concerns by portraying the natural world as something sacred that is being eroded and invaded by human greed. Her rejection of the modern life mirrors a kind of protest against such exploitations and emphasises on the need to reconnect and protect nature. The wilderness in *Surfacing* serves as a crucial metaphor for the protagonist's evolving sense of identity, as it represents both the external environment and her inner psychological landscape. As she ventures into the Canadian wilderness, the natural world becomes a mirror for her fragmented self, reflecting the struggle between her societal conditioning and a deeper, more primal identity tied to the land. The wilderness is untamed, raw, and vast—qualities that resonate with the protagonist's own internal chaos as she grapples with memories of her father, her abortion, and her broken relationships. The wilderness, free from the constraints of modern consumerism and patriarchal control, offers her a space to confront these suppressed emotions and shed the layers of social and gendered expectations. It becomes the backdrop for her psychological breakdown, where she moves beyond the limitations of civilized, structured life and reclaims a more fluid, undefined self.

The metaphysical concept that nature serves as the boundary through which humanity conceives of its differences from the non-human world is central to *Surfacing*, and Atwood uses this

idea to explore how the boundaries between human and non-human are not as clear-cut as they seem. In many ways, the novel problematizes the very idea that humans are distinct from nature. The protagonist's journey into the wilderness becomes a process of dissolving these conceptual boundaries, as she increasingly sees herself not as separate from, but as a part of, the natural world.

At the heart of this metaphysical exploration is the question of what defines or counts as human. Throughout the novel, nature is depicted as a space beyond human society, a realm that exists outside of human constructs, norms, and civilization. For the protagonist, society represents constraint and control, largely through the patriarchal systems that define her identity and role. In contrast, nature symbolises a kind of freedom, a space where these artificial human distinctions no longer apply. As she rejects the layers of her socially constructed identity—her roles as lover, a victim, and even her sense of self as part of human society—she begins to blur the lines between herself and the natural world. This dissolution of boundaries questions what it means to be human, as the protagonist moves beyond societal definitions of humanity and seeks a more fundamental, primal connection to existence.

This metaphysical collapse between human and non-human also ties into the novel's themes of ecological awareness. The protagonist's growing recognition of ecological degradation reflects a deeper understanding of how human exploitation of nature mirrors the exploitation of marginalized groups, particularly women. In a patriarchal, consumerist society, both women and nature are "othered" and objectified, reduced to resources to be controlled and consumed. The novel critiques this view, suggesting that the health of human identity is tied to the health of the environment—by estranging humanity from nature, society alienates individuals from themselves. The protagonist's journey, then, becomes an act of reconciling these divisions, not just to reclaim her identity but to redefine what it means to be human in a world where humans are intimately connected to and dependent upon the natural world.

When the narrator in the novel, *Surfacing* talks about animals, who do not need language—why speak when you already embody meaning? For this she states an example, where she leans

against a tree, and in doing so, she becomes part of it. This moment symbolises the protagonist's growing empathy with the natural world and the creatures within it, as she begins to understand her own subjugation through the lens of the voicelessness and exploitation of animals. This interconnectedness fosters her deeper awareness of the hierarchies that oppress both women and animals, urging a rethinking of their treatment. The protagonist's growing recognition of the exploitation and suffering of animals, which in turn leads her to question the structures of power and dominance that also govern her own experience as a woman. It underscores the ethical and emotional connections between the oppression of animals and the marginalisation of women, challenging the hierarchies that separate them.

Animality plays a crucial role in *Surfacing*, as Atwood draws explicit connections between the treatment of women and animals. Both are objectified, consumed, and controlled by patriarchal society, with the protagonist identifying with animals in their vulnerability and marginalisation. Her interactions with animals—such as the scene where she witnesses the brutal killing of a heron—force her to confront the violence inherent in a system that devalues both human and non-human life. This identification with animals highlights the theme of animality in the novel, where the protagonist seeks a more symbiotic relationship with the natural world, contrasting the exploitative relationship promoted by modern, industrial society. The merging of human and animal identities points to a broader critique of the anthropocentric worldview, challenging the hierarchy that places humans above animals and suggesting that a true understanding of self and place requires dismantling these hierarchies.

Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* operates as a multi-layered text that offers both ecological and feminist critiques, examining the intersections of environment, gender, identity, and human existence. The novel critiques the exploitation of both nature and women by patriarchal and colonial systems, drawing clear parallels between the two. The wilderness, a symbol of untamed nature, is threatened by industrialisation and consumerism, much like the protagonist's identity is subject to patriarchal control. Ecologically, the novel is a call to recognise the degradation of nature as an extension of the

violence inflicted on marginalized groups, particularly women. The protagonist's increasing awareness of environmental destruction reflects an ecocritical concern—the destruction of wilderness is not just a loss of space but a loss of connection to something vital and uncommodified, much like the oppression of women under patriarchy.

From a feminist perspective, Atwood critiques how women are marginalized, commodified, and treated as resources by male-dominated structures, much like nature. The protagonist's journey into the wilderness mirrors her rejection of these structures, as she peels back layers of societal expectations and embraces a deeper, primal self that is aligned with nature. The novel examines gender performativity as the protagonist rejects the roles imposed on her—mother, lover, victim—and seeks a more authentic existence beyond the constraints of societal norms. By stripping herself of clothing and entering the wilderness naked, she symbolically sheds the performative aspects of her identity and seeks a deeper, unmediated connection with the natural world. This can be seen as a rejection of the societal “performance” (Butler) expected of her, aligning with Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, where identity is understood as a series of socially prescribed acts rather than an inherent essence.

The protagonist embodies contradictions, such as the tension between her need for independence and societal expectations placed upon her as a woman. These contradictions echo larger societal conflicts, such as the divide between urban, modern life and the natural world. The novel critiques the false dichotomy between humanity and nature, suggesting that societal norms and industrialisation create harmful separations that result in ecological and psychological damage.

In *Surfacing*, the dualities and contradictions in the narrator's life directly embody the complex relationship between humanity, nature, and civilization, aligning with Lawrence Buell's ecocritical ideas. Buell's argument that the non-human environment is not just a backdrop but a central, dynamic force in human history is reflected throughout the novel, where nature is not passive but an active agent in the narrator's journey. The wilderness of Canada is not merely a setting for the protagonist's retreat, but an entity with its own power and autonomy. It's a space that forces the



protagonist to confront her internal contradictions, the fractures in her identity, and the ways in which her life has been shaped by human civilisation's oppressive structures—especially patriarchal and colonial forces.

The narrator's life is full of contradictions—she is caught between her past and present, her Canadian identity and the pressures of American consumerism, and her role as a woman in a male-dominated society. These dualities extend to her relationships, particularly the way she views men and women, civilization and wilderness, and life and death. Her gradual realization that she cannot neatly categorise these experiences or aspects of her life reflects the broader ecological understanding that humanity cannot be separated from nature. Nature, in *Surfacing*, is not something “other” to the human experience; instead, human history and identity are deeply implicated in the natural world. The wilderness is where the protagonist begins to unravel these contradictions, realising that her personal history—her abortion, her relationships, her father's disappearance—is intertwined with the natural history of the land. In this way, *Surfacing* reflects Buell's assertion that human history is implicated in natural history.

Moreover, the novel reinforces Buell's point that human interests are not the only legitimate concerns. Throughout the novel, Atwood critiques human domination over nature, particularly through the lens of American industrialism and consumerism, which encroach upon the Canadian wilderness. The narrator's deepening awareness of ecological destruction reflects a shift in perspective—she comes to see that nature has its own inherent value, independent of human use or exploitation. The scene where the narrator encounters the mutilated heron, killed for sport by careless humans, symbolises this recognition. Nature is not just a resource for human exploitation, but a living system with its own rights and agency. This echoes Buell's idea that human interests are not paramount, and it positions the environment as an active, vital presence that demands respect and care.

Buell's third point about human accountability to the environment as part of the text's ethical orientation is also central to *Surfacing*. The protagonist's transformation is partly an ecological

awakening—her psychological breakdown and rejection of societal norms lead her to a deeper awareness of humanity's destructive relationship with nature. The novel critiques the human tendency to dominate and exploit the natural world, particularly through colonial and patriarchal lenses. The narrator's eventual rejection of civilization, symbolised by her immersion into the wilderness, represents an attempt to reconcile with the natural world, to accept responsibility for the ways in which human actions have harmed the environment. Her decision to live in harmony with nature toward the end of the novel suggests a newfound sense of accountability—both to the environment and to herself.

Finally, Buell's idea that the environment should be seen as a process, rather than a static entity, is implicit in *Surfacing*. The wilderness in the novel is dynamic, constantly shifting and changing, much like the protagonist's evolving identity. The environment is portrayed as something fluid and alive, not a constant or unchanging backdrop. This reflects the ecological understanding that nature is not something to be controlled or fixed in place, but a process that exists in its own right. The lake, the forest, and the animals all play a role in the protagonist's transformation, showing that nature is not passive but an active, evolving force. In this sense, the novel aligns with Buell's ecocritical ideas, demonstrating that the environment is not just a backdrop to human drama but a living, changing process that humans must reckon with and be accountable to.

The novel *Surfacing* embodies Buell's principles by portraying nature as a central, dynamic force in human life, emphasising that human history and identity are inseparable from the natural world. It critiques the human tendency to place its interests above the environment and calls for an ethical accountability to the natural world. Finally, it shows the environment as a process rather than a static entity, a constantly evolving system that demands respect and understanding.

Atwood thus portrays domination as a pervasive force that manifests in the relationships between characters, particularly in the interactions between men and women. The protagonist grapples with the oppressive influence of patriarchal society, which seeks to define her identity and limit her autonomy. Her relationships with male characters, including her lover and her father,

highlight the ways in which women are often relegated to subordinate roles, stripped of their agency and voice. This dynamic is echoed in the treatment of the natural world, which is depicted as an entity that is also oppressed and exploited. The male characters embody the colonial mentality that views both women and nature as resources to be dominated and controlled, reinforcing the idea that exploitation is inherent in the structures of power that govern human relationships.

Additionally, Canada's past is characterised by the domination of Indigenous peoples and the exploitation of natural resources by European settlers. The binary oppositions of coloniser/colonised and male/female are central to this historical narrative, as each pair positions one side as superior to the other. This dynamic is reflected in the protagonist's personal struggles and her efforts to reclaim her identity in a world defined by such inequalities. The theme of domination is not just an individual experience but is rooted in the broader historical context that informs contemporary Canadian identity.

Therefore, the theme of domination and oppression in *Surfacing* operates on multiple levels: it critiques the patriarchal structures that marginalise women and exposes the ecological exploitation inherent in colonial histories. By examining these dynamics through the lens of binary oppositions and liminal spaces, the novel reveals the complexities of identity formation in a postcolonial context, ultimately advocating for a more nuanced understanding of both human and non-human experiences. Atwood's narrative challenges readers to reconsider the hierarchies of power that define relationships and the ethical responsibilities humanity holds toward the environment and marginalized voices.

Atwood challenges binaries such as nature vs. civilization, male vs. female, and self vs. other in *Surfacing* through the protagonist's journey of self-discovery and the complex interplay between these concepts throughout the narrative. Atwood's *Surfacing* intricately weaves together themes of identity, nature, and marginalisation, challenging traditional binaries and highlighting the interconnectedness of all beings. The protagonist's journey reflects a deeper understanding of self that transcends individualism, advocating for a holistic approach that recognises the ethical and political implications of our relationships with both women and the environment. The connections

between the historical treatment of women and nature serve as a powerful critique of societal structures that continue to marginalise and exploit both, urging a re-evaluation of the narratives that define our existence.

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## Waste Landscapes and Poetic Renewal in Modernist Poetry

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**Abstract:** This paper examines how Modernist poetry addresses ‘waste landscape’ or ‘waste’ as both a theme and aesthetic device, revealing a ‘waste management’ re-negotiation with the content and form of the poetry. I investigate how a complex renegotiation presented ‘waste’ under the new forms of meaning and knowledge. Through various kinds of bolder rearrangements made by the modernists, the waste landscapes are fixed into a new jigsaw of an exteriorized other self. I analyse the works of T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Marianne Moore, H.D., Hart Crane, William Carlos Williams, and Wallace Stevens to befittingly re-read into these waste landscapes.

**Keywords:** Modernist Poetry, Waste Landscape, Ecocriticism, Modernist Poets, Linguistic Economy, Linguistic Experimentation.

### Introduction

Waste, seemingly innocuous yet deeply repulsive, played a fascinating role in shaping the Modernist philosophy of art and creation. In Modernist texts, waste landscapes—whether urban detritus or deserted settings—function both as literal backdrops and as symbolic spaces where societal decay is foregrounded. As *Waste Studies* scholars like Susan Signe Morrison articulate, waste sites are more than ecological realities; they are existential commentaries on human neglect and disposability in an industrial age (Morrison 25). While investigating ecocritical discourses, which Kerridge and Sammells expand by proposing that waste serves as a landscape ripe for ethical critique, where the environmental and social injustices inherent in pollution and urban blight come to the fore (3-15).

Modernist poets like T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and William Carlos Williams redefined aesthetic principles by promoting a poetic restructuring as a counter to the ‘wastefulness’ of verbose language

in the early 20th century. Eliot's minimalist landscapes in *The Waste Land* portray 'wastelands' both as physical spaces and products of cultural-linguistic decay. As Zygmunt Bauman suggests in *Wasted Lives*, Modernity inherently produces 'waste'—both in its physical form and as marginalized individuals cast aside by industrialization and progress (Bauman 34-50). These themes are reflected in Modernist poetry's pursuit of the 'economy of language,' where brevity is a necessary discipline to articulate meaning amidst linguistic and material excess.

The paper proposes that the formal experimentation in Modernist poetry can be interpreted as a kind of artistic 'waste management' system, where poets consciously discard excessive language and outdated forms to create refined, clean narratives. By applying the principles of free verse, fragmentation, compression, and intertextuality, they respond to this cultural and societal waste, involving economizing language and reimagining structure. This 'waste management' goes beyond compression, encompassing a kind of recycling of traditional forms, rearranging fragments to convey new, layered meanings that reflect the disarray of modern life.

In T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), particularly in the opening section of "The Burial of the Dead," waste is valorised as a physical barren land of cultural and spiritual degradation. As a reaction to post-war Europe, he paints a bleak picture of a barren landscape, a "dead land" from which "April is the cruellest month" emerges, suggesting an environment of decay where life itself is painful. The landscape is irrevocably tainted, forcing life upon a world that may no longer be capable of sustaining it. The "dead tree," "dry stone," and "no sound of water" all evoke a land stripped of fertility.

While *The Waste Land* is steeped in such images of decay, he introduces the possibility of renewal through a radical stabilization of the poetry altogether. This potential for transformation echoes later in the section titled "What the Thunder Said," where he writes, "These fragments I have shored against my ruins" (line 430). Eliot suggests that even if society itself cannot be fully restored, fragments of meaning can be salvaged from the cultural debris, creating a type of poetic renewal from waste. He parallels the concept of reusing and recycling waste. By employing structural techniques

like polyvocality and free verse, he gives a new meaning to disparate, ‘wasted’ cultural fragments. He borrows from Eastern spirituality, from the Upanishads, “*Datta, Dayadhvam, Damyata*” (line 432), which closes the poem with positive hope. Christopher Ricks interprets this technique as Eliot's way of using “waste” fragments to construct a unified poetic voice that transcends cultural divisions (Rick 150). Critics such as Michael North argue that Eliot’s reclamation of ‘wasted’ cultural elements is essential to his vision of poetic renewal. The references to classical works, religious texts, and historical events function as a kind of ‘waste management’ preserving cultural meaning even when society is in decline (North 94). Meanwhile, Patricia Rae suggests that Eliot’s form of “making new” draws on a distinctly modernist ethos of recycling to confront cultural decay (Rae 58).

A similar fragmented urban landscape is shown through Williams’ fragmented stanzas, sudden pauses, and non-traditional punctuation—such as dashes and ellipses. As critic James E. Breslin observes in *William Carlos Williams: An American Artist*, William’s abrupt syntax and pared-down diction emphasize a language that is rooted in American speech” and “builds a collage of city life” that reflects both its fragmentation and its potential for coherence (Breslin 203). Meanwhile, Eliot's use of punctuation, abrupt pauses, and condensed syntax was a way to represent “a wasteland of individual lines and phrases” that, when pieced together, create a deeper, “redeemed” structure (Eliot 85).

In Hart Crane’s “Brooklyn Bridge” (1930), ‘waste’ can be seen through several lenses. While it focuses primarily on American urbanization, its themes resonate with the socio-political conditions of England in the early 20th century. Crane’s emphasis on the ‘waste’ of beauty and connection can be viewed as a commentary on the universal experience of industrialization and the resulting alienation felt in both America and England. However, the poem’s rhythm, flow, and imagery evoke a sense of reclamation:

O, to grace the stormy, windy height—

With your vibrancy of steel!



While this duality with waste and technology is crucial to modernists, the vibrancy in Crane's bridge longs to reclaim the beauty and connection of modernity. This thematic interplay reflects a broader modernist tendency to balance critique with an affirmation of human creativity (Perkins, *A History of Modern Poetry*).

William Carlos Williams writes in "Paterson," "A man like a city and a woman like a flower / —who are in love. Two women. Three women. Innumerable women, each like a flower" (45). This line showcases his characteristic compression and imagistic style, drawing together disparate ideas to showcase the cycle of urban destruction and potential rebirth. The metaphor of the Passaic River, central to the work, embodies both physical and symbolic waste, representing how industrial runoff has polluted the environment while simultaneously providing a constant presence that shapes the lives of those in the city. He writes, "Paterson lies in the valley under the Passaic Falls / its spent waters forming the outpost of our northern boundaries" (3), placing Paterson's geographic as symbolic. In the line, "the river comes pouring in above the city / and crashes from the edge of the gorge" (93), the urban decay is juxtaposed with moments of transcendence. The river symbolizes a force that cleanses and erodes simultaneously.

Marianne Moore's "An Octopus," a sprawling work about Mount Rainier, uses linguistic precision to comment on environmental degradation and the intrusion of human interference in natural landscapes. Lines like "a glassy octopus symmetrically pointed; its claw cut by the avalanche" emphasize nature's disruption due to industrial encroachment (134).

Her attention to punctuation—particularly her use of hyphens and semi-colons—is a rhythmic interruption. Say "of glass-like glacier that opens its arms"—a line which, through enjambment, gives the impression of stilted movement, capturing the glacier's struggle between growth and degradation (Moore 136). Scholar Bonnie Costello notes that Moore's linguistic precision creates a collage effect, an "assemblage" of details that can "both confront and accommodate the encroaching world" (94).

Moore also drives our attention to "incremental litter" left behind by tourists, presenting a human presence as disruptive and inconsequential in the face of the glacier's grandiosity. She writes,

“its armoured-plate of ice will glitter / like splintered glass” (135). This “splintered glass” image evokes waste while also suggesting that even fragments, like glass, can reflect beauty, creating a paradox that intertwines degradation with unexpected allure.

The fragmented structure and linguistic choices serve as linguistic debris—references from religion, myth, literature, and everyday life—that Eliot carefully arranges, suggesting that there may be redemption in reconstruction. Ezra Pound and Eliot saw free verse as a vehicle for ‘profound intertextuality,’ where texts interact with or reference other works, enhancing the complexity of modernist poetry. T.E. Hulme, an early advocate for modernist poetry, influenced the development of free verse in English poetry, introducing more organic structures inspired by French Symbolists. Hulme argued that free verse allowed for a more “flexible, organic structure” that aligned with the innovative spirit of modernism. This flexibility is apparent in *Preludes*, as Eliot employs a free verse form that emphasizes the poem’s bleak, fragmented landscape (Gasiorek 2015).

In *Preludes*, Eliot uses free verse to incorporate allusions to a broader cultural landscape, weaving images that resonate with decay and suggest a need for renewal (Suarez). According to Gasiorek, Eliot’s free verse and fragmented style “reflect the disarray of modern life” while offering glimpses of clarity and order in moments of artistic unity (Gasiorek 2015). Both Pound and Eliot advocated for careful application of free verse, fearing that its “indiscriminate application” could dilute its artistic potential. They saw free verse as enabling poets to discard restrictive structures while remaining purposeful and avoiding excessive or careless use. For Eliot, this structural freedom in *Preludes* supports his thematic focus on a world where traditional forms—both poetic and societal—are decaying.

Eliot’s use of “the Unreal City” in *The Waste Land* encapsulates a world marked by industrialization and soulless modern life, where once-sacred spaces are transformed into urban waste, echoing mythological desolation. The phrase, often cited as emblematic of Eliot’s critique of urban moral decay, illustrates the poet’s perspective on humanity’s disconnection from nature and tradition. In his essay, “Ulysses, Order, and Myth,” Eliot describes the mythical method as “a way of

controlling, of ordering, of giving shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history” (Eliot 177). Scholars have noted how Eliot’s use of myth is part of a broader response within ‘Waste Studies,’ which considers environmental degradation and the fragmentation of the modern landscape. Kerridge and Sammells discuss this in *Writing the Environment*, describing the shift in ecocriticism from nature-focused to exploring “environmental degradation and social inequities.” His invocation of Ecclesiastes, “There is nothing new under the sun” (Eccles. 1:9), critiques modernity’s repetitive and circular decay, suggesting that humanity is trapped in cycles of moral and cultural degradation (Eliot). By integrating mythological references—like those from *Satyricon* and the *Book of Ecclesiastes*—Eliot highlights a cycle of decay that is simultaneously personal, cultural, and spiritual. His reliance on these classical sources serves as a literary recycling mechanism, providing a means to recontextualize past wisdom within modernity. In “The Fire Sermon,” Eliot weaves in allusions from St. Augustine to the Buddha’s sermon against attachment, illustrating the moral and spiritual decay he perceives in the modern world. By invoking these distant voices, he reclaims spiritual texts as calls to address moral “waste”—the emptiness Eliot sees in modern desires and values. “Eliot’s *Waste Land* operates as a cultural compost heap, recycling fragments to create meaning amid the detritus” (Gasiorek 2015).

Ezra Pound, too, relies on compression and ‘ideogrammic references’ to activate this method of waste management. By refraining from linear narratives and opting for a sparse language and juxtaposition, he utilizes the “economy of language” as described by Hugh Kenner in *The Pound Era*, noting that “Pound scrapes away the detritus of civilization to reveal what is essential” (54). In *Cantos*, Ezra Pound explores the concept of waste by critiquing it as a societal decay and a method for reclaiming lost meaning, using cultural and historical references. As Christine Froula notes in *To Write Paradise: Style and Error in Pound’s Cantos*, this approach allowed Pound to “shore against the ruins of a fractured culture,” preserving remnants of civilization that might otherwise be lost (9).

Throughout *Cantos*, he juxtaposes cultural degradation and potential for renewal with myth, pauses, ellipses, and abrupt transitions. This structural fragmentation, as scholar Ronald Bush argues,

allows him to “invoke both the permanence and decay of cultural memory,” creating a sense that the past, even in ruins, holds insights for the present (112). Pound’s choice to incorporate Chinese ideograms as visual images reflects this principle of reclaiming fragmented elements, where each symbol condenses meaning into a visual form, reducing linguistic ‘waste.’ His allusions to Confucian texts, where the ideogrammic structure points to an ideal of governance and ethics, also suggest a meaningful order that can emerge from what appears as chaos (Pound 23). A key line, “Pull down thy vanity,” from *Canto LXXXI*, highlights the destructive waste of ego and corruption within modern civilization. He continues, “I have wasted so much life,” framing waste as a loss of purpose yet also implying the potential to correct these losses through self-reflection and cultural preservation (Pound 521).

Even H. D. (Hilda Doolittle) captures the essence of waste and renewal through mythological retellings. In *Helen in Egypt*, H.D. combines myth and modernity to critique war’s destruction, using sparse, evocative language to convey a landscape both decayed and sacred. The poem’s fragmented structure and intertextual references ‘recycle’ ancient stories, creating what Friedman describes as “mythic reconstitution,” a deliberate reuse of the old to make sense of the new, which reflects Modernism’s recycling of cultural fragments into renewed meanings. Thus, intertextuality functioned as a form of literary recycling. It enabled modernists to repurpose pieces of past literature, myths, and historical references in a rapidly modernizing world.

In William Carlos Williams’ *Spring and All*, imagination is central to transforming waste into something meaningful, as it reclaims the neglected or decayed fragments of modern life. Williams sees imagination as a means to reshape reality, describing it as “a force comparable to electricity or steam” (*Imaginations* 120). His view that imagination possesses the raw power to generate newness, giving language and experience fresh vitality, he describes imagination as “drunk with prohibitions” that “destroys everything afresh,” emphasizing how imagination clears away stagnant artistic conventions, creating room for renewal (Williams 93). His advocacy for new metaphors and analogies, as articulated by Hulme in his “Modern Lecture on Poetry,” (1908) sees the power of new

metaphor in modern poetry as instrumental in “the constant endeavour to see things as they are” without the distortions of sentimentality or the vagueness of Romantic excess. Thus, it calls for imagination’s role in developing innovative forms rather than recycling established ideas and clichés. Williams uses scientific metaphors to conceptualize imagination as volatile energy, comparing it to “electricity or steam,” capable of explosive renewal but inherently unpredictable and disorderly (Williams 120). Here, Williams contrasts his approach to Ezra Pound’s notion of structured forms, like the “magnet creating pattern in iron filings” (Pound 154). Williams’ imagination resists confinement, enabling spontaneous and unstructured expressions of waste and modernity.

In this way, he ‘salvages’ the perception of raw material, promoting a form of recycling that turns waste into a renewed vision of reality. This idea is apparent in Williams’ poetic landscapes, which Schuster describes as littered with “grim images that evoke urban and natural detritus,” but these images are revitalized through imaginative reinterpretation, merging elements of decay with possibilities for renewal (Schuster 116–132). His fragmented lines and inclusion of incomplete thoughts and dashes mimic the chaotic, piecemeal reality of industrial life, yet through imaginative portrayal, they blend decay with life, suggesting poetry’s role as a vessel for new understanding and order. Williams also acknowledges the modern need to blend “illusions” with “realities,” given that modernity, lacking mythic figures to connect life with larger cosmic patterns, compels individuals to reconcile reality with imagination. This approach is evident in his lines “Somebody dies every four minutes in New York State” juxtaposed with “You will rot and be blown/through the next solar system/with the rest of the gases.” Here, Williams highlights the stark physicality of death within a cosmic, imagined vision, drawing attention to poetry’s capacity to contain this vast range of human experience (Williams 127).

Additionally, Williams explores imagination’s intrinsic violence, a “violence from within . . . pressing back against the pressure of reality,” linking it with the abstraction seen in modern art (Williams 14, 116). Wallace Stevens, particularly in *The Man with the Blue Guitar* and *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction*, examines waste as literal detritus and a symbol of modern disillusionment. His

idea that “Reality is a cliché / From which we escape by metaphor,” positions metaphor and imagination as essential tools to transcend the mundane and grapple with the waste of contemporary experience (Stevens 920). Thus, imagination in Williams’s poetry serves as a mechanism for not only recycling but also transforming the waste of modern life into revitalized art.

Eliot’s lines from his later poetry, such as *Four Quartets* (1936), illustrate the modernist view of creation as an iterative, challenging process that inevitably involves failure, experimentation, and the “shabby equipment” of existing forms (Eliot 189).

So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years-  
Twenty years largely wasted, the years of *l’entre deux guerres*-  
Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt  
Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure  
Because one has only learnt to get the better of words  
For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which  
One is no longer disposed to say it and so each venture  
Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate  
With shabby equipment always deteriorating. (Eliot 189)

His reflection on art as a continual “raid on the inarticulate” speaks to the poet’s need to confront and reshape the past, using literary forms that may seem inadequate or “deteriorating” but are nonetheless critical tools for innovation. This process is akin to the poetic ‘waste management, that Eliot and other modernists pursued—an ongoing battle to repurpose language and form to fit the modern age, even as these forms wear out and require renewal. He acknowledges that every attempt at poetry feels like “a wholly new start” and a “different kind of failure,” emphasizing the instability of language and the continuous re-evaluation required for poetic innovation. There is a constant recalibration of craft- a need to “salvage” tradition rather than discard it entirely. As he alludes to the weariness of “twenty years largely wasted,” particularly in the “*l’entre deux guerres*” (the interwar period), he reflects on a life spent wrestling with language, attempting to create meaning out of cultural detritus. The notion

that “permanent elimination of waste” is “an impossible feat” becomes evident in the persistence of these “shabby” yet essential forms that help to articulate modern life, which has been ravaged by disillusionment and fragmentation.

Modernist poetry emerges as a critique of a deliberate reworking of fragmentation. The likeness of a radical linguistic structure engages effectively with the ‘cultural detritus’, serving as a container for loss, transformation, and continuity. ‘Waste,’ an inherent phenomenon of modern life, becomes resilient and adaptable, finding a new meaning. As Susan Signe Morrison and other scholars in Waste Studies suggest, the aesthetic reuse of ‘waste’ in Modernist works provides a unique lens through which to view art’s role as a repository of societal anxieties and a vessel for renewal. Modernist poetry embodies the enduring human impulse to find meaning, clarity, and even beauty within a world that appears increasingly changing.

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## **The Romantic Discovery of the Homeland: Polish Context**

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**Abstract:** The era of Romantic literature in Poland brought a revival in the description of the landscape of the homeland. This type of phenomenon has two sources in Polish tradition. The first stems from the philosophical foundations of Romanticism, especially the philosophy of nature developed by early German Romanticism. In literary consequences, what is wild, regional and national in nature has become closer than what is artificial, general and universal. The second source for a new understanding of the native landscape is also important: Polish historical experience. In the 19th century, Polish culture was deprived of its own independent state and lost the ability to maintain its own administration or education. Therefore, belles-lettres have the obligation to show Polishness, which still exists and still has regenerative abilities.

Many elements of the works of Adam Mickiewicz, Seweryn Goszczyński and Wincenty Pol can, therefore, be understood not in the context of showing the geography of the former Polish state but as an expression of longing and dreams for a space in which Poles will become free and happy in a new way.

**Keywords:** Romanticism, Polish Literature, Homeland-Landscape, Adam Mickiewicz, Seweryn Goszczyński, Wincenty Pol

### **European Context for Polish Romanticism**

The era of Romantic literature in Poland (1822-1864), after the realizations in the Old Polish period (Kalinowski 2019, 41-47), brought a renewal of the ways of describing the landscape of the homeland. This resulted from two sources as well as historical and philosophical tendencies. The first type derives from the philosophical ideas of Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) and early German

Romanticism. As for Herder, he wondered about the issues of historical laws that stimulate the development of humanity and put forward the thesis about the existence of various, diverse spirits of nations recognized in Europe (Herder 1989). According to the philosopher, the distinctiveness of the spirits of nations could be described using the terrain or climate features. Europe, described by Herder in this way, became a space of land understood not so much in the dimension of physical geography but of symbolic and imagined geography. In the cultural result of Herder's deliberations, and in the wake of later generations of Romantics European Romantics, savagery was perceived in the East, and civilizational savagery in the West. In the North, the severity and secrecy of the people living there were recognised, while in the South, the gentleness and optimism of the inhabitants. Herder thus combined the features of the spirit of nations with the shape of physical geographical space (Bräuer 1995; Szczodrowski 1997).

For the 19th century discourse on Slavic culture, and therefore Polish culture, Herder was an important thinker by the very fact that he appreciated the presence of this ethnic element in the history of all of Europe. He recognized Slavic cultural, moral and religious differences, which was a bold idea at the time, as well as a very inspiring one. After all, in medieval and later chronicle-historical accounts formulated by Western European authors, the Slavs were regarded as barbarians, culturally retarded people with no sense of identity. Herder, on the other hand, ennobled the Slavs. However, his attitude also had a negative aspect. Herder stigmatized the Slavs, giving them the position of a “young” ethnos that was only entering the arena of great history, imitating, as it were, the achievements of the “old” nations: Franks, Normans or Saxons. The German philosopher thought that the Slavs were people of the land, farmers, and possibly forest and wetland dwellers. He believed that their natural activities were farming and shepherding, while their common traits were hospitality and peaceful conflict resolution. He also saw in them a respect for the divinity of Nature and a strong attachment to the ancestral land. This was a cultural projection, mostly adopted by Slavic intellectuals, present until World War II (Witkowska 1972; Witkowska 1980; Kalinowski 2016, 37-54).

As for the second philosophical factor important for the Polish tradition of describing the homeland, it is worth noting the ideological proposals of early German Romanticism. Particularly interesting in such a context are the descriptions of the relationship between man and the signs of nature by Georg von Hardenberg (aka Novalis, 1772-1801) or the philosophy of nature developed by Friedrich Schelling (1775-1854). As for Novalis, it should be emphasized here that, for example, in his novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (Novalis 2015), the understanding of nature as a set of material values (e.g. minerals or the world of flora and fauna) was transformed towards immaterial values of psychological and spiritual significance (the mountain landscape became an image of longing for the sublime and God, images of the interior of the earth were a reflection of the desire for self-analysis). Thus, literary meditations on the landscape experienced by the heroes of Novalis's works led not only to the discovery of the ancient history of a given place but also to an increasingly deeper knowledge of one's own "self" (Molnar 1973: 272-286; Nischik 1984, 159-177; Kalinowski 2008: 157-194).

As for Schelling, it is worth noting that in his considerations contained in the work *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur* (1797), he perceived nature as a derivative of ontological existence (Schelling 2017). The study of nature was not only an analysis of its products (pragmatically understood soil, vegetation, water bodies or mountains) but also an investigation of the processes of transformations occurring in it and discovering its "interior." Schelling understood nature as a living and creative force, manifesting itself in oppositions: mountains-valleys, deserts-marshes or forests-meadows. A human being placed in front of nature was not only a user of natural goods and a conqueror of wealth but also a sensitive and wise participant in the world (Esposito 1977; Shaw 2011).

There is no room here for a deep analysis of the relationship between the aforementioned philosophical or literary proposals. The most important thing for the subject matter I am interested in is that thanks to the ideas of German Romanticism, artistic creations of psychologizing, symbolizing, sacralizing and absolutizing the landscape, the homeland, the region, and finally, the homeland could be created in Polish literature of the 19th century.

## **The Polish Experience of History**

In creating an ambiguous image of the native land in Polish literature of the 19th century, the experience of European universal history is very important. It must be remembered here that the Polish state, founded in the 10th century and then existing through the families of Piasts, Jagiellons and elected kings, ceased to function in 1795. This happened as a result of a number of factors, the important of which were both internal (poor and backward society, ineffective royal power, the growth of the rights of the nobility as the most important social stratum) and external factors (the growth of political and military aspirations of Poland's neighbouring states). As a result of the political and administrative partition of Poland (the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth), the hitherto dominant lands of native culture and language were seized by three states: Russia, Prussia and Austria. Poles throughout the 19th century were thus deprived of their own independent state and lost the opportunity to practice their own self-consciousness. They tried to change this state of affairs with national uprisings (uprisings in 1834, 1848 or 1864), but each time, they lost to external opponents and their own organizational and social limitations. In turn, the decision-makers of the aggressor states began to apply methodical Germanization or Russification to Polish society in order to erase the national feeling in Poles and impose different and foreign cultural values (Janion, Żmigrodzka 1978; Davies 1981).

One of the strongest forms of defence of Polish culture against oppressive phenomena on the part of Russia, Prussia, and Austria was art and literature. Since there were no strictly Polish educational or cultural institutions in the Romantic period, it was the creators of poetry, prose and drama who took on the responsibility of cultivating Polishness, presenting it in attractive literary forms saturated with historical, cultural and linguistic knowledge. It was to show the constant vitality of Polish culture, its advantages, achievements to date and prospects for the future.

In terms of describing the native land, Polish writers faced a multifaceted task. First, they wanted to show the historical history of the broadly defined Polish culture developing from the banks of the Elbe in the west, to the Dnieper in the east, from the Baltic Sea in the north to the Carpathian

Mountains in the south. Secondly, they wanted to express a range of positive emotions related to their love of their homeland, their native land, the beauty of nature, customs and human relations, thanks to which the literary myth of the Polish lands as a multicultural space and an area of religious tolerance developed. Thirdly, their descriptions of the Polish lands, both as seen in centuries past and as presented from a current perspective, were intended to be a form of specific self-therapy. Artistically, it was intended to bring to users of Polish culture the conviction that despite the absence of an independent state, an army or a government of their own, one can still feel Polish and constantly nurture a sense of ethnic consciousness (Milosz 1983; Nasilowska 2024).

### **Descriptions of the Homeland**

Polish romantic writers, just like romantic historians, wanted to bring their readers closer to their native history, describe the diversity of the regions of the now-defunct state, and characterize the multitude of peoples and customs inhabiting Polish lands. In cases where they did not have access to historical sources or where they had not personally visited, they used poetic imagination. The attention of Polish writers and poets was drawn to the spiritual and material legacy of ancient Poles and Slavs, and as a result, literature began to be permeated with more and more themes commemorating the local, regional, and ethnic world, taking place in the territory of Central Europe, on the Vistula, Warta, Oder, Niemen, and Dnieper rivers, which was a counterweight to the cosmopolitan patterns of Western European culture. Through such a turn towards locality, writers strengthened their own and the national identity of Poles. Polish Romantics positively valued and elevated tradition, the past, and attachment to what was native. Images of the territory of the Slavic world carried the conviction that the lands between the Baltic and the Carpathian Mountains were civilizationally free from the cultural corruption of the West of Paris, London or Vienna. It was a space of domination of nature, primordial social laws, moral health and physical vitality (Janion 2006; Rudaś-Grodzka 2013: 30-56).

One of the most important writers of Polish Romanticism, who consistently created the myth of antiquity and the Polish civilizational enclave, was Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855), who gained

the greatest respect not only among Polish readers but also in the pan-European arena (Rymkiewicz, Siwicka, Witkowska, Zielińska 2001; Koropeczy 2008). It was thanks to his *Ballady i romanse* (1822) that Polish literature was so strongly influenced by the province, folklore and nativeness, which, unlike the earlier Enlightenment era, began to be qualified positively (Mickiewicz 1986). It was here, in the spaces of wild forests and clean lakes, in villages and small communities, that the most important dramas of life took place, and the deepest human wisdom was available. Mickiewicz wanted to show through colourful images of the native land, descriptions of the inhabitants of the Polish-Belarusian-Lithuanian countryside, poetic references to the natural law applied around and mentions of folk religiosity that Polish culture is still not lost. Moreover, the reader receives a strong signal that there are still places in the Polish lands annexed by the Russian partitioners where it is possible to successfully defend oneself both against the educated, intellectual and artificial civilization of Western Europe and against the aggressive, perfidious and absolutist civilization of Eastern Europe (Milosz 1983: 210-211; Cysewski 1987; Piwińska 1995, 6: 32-43).

The second example of Mickiewicz's respect for the past and his native land was the national epic *Pan Tadeusz* (1834), in which a small area of today's Lithuania became the "centre of Polishness" (Mickiewicz 2024). It was here that representatives of all social classes of the time were found (nobility, peasants, clergy, Jews, Russians). Here, Mickiewicz showed the reality of the early 19th century and a small noble settlement where old interpersonal relations, social hierarchy and old cultural customs prevail. The space created by the poet is the eastern part of central Europe, right next to large swaths of forests, among lakes and fields of arable land. Great historical events or intellectual movements of the world of that time reach the place described in *Pan Tadeusz* like a distant echo. More important, however, is life subordinated to the rhythm of nature, where the inhabitants coexist with the forest and humbly submit to the necessity of working on the land. The author of the poem describes many details of everyday life and elements of the natural world, convinced that in this way he leaves a memento of the lost space of his own youth, but also of a place of existence typical of noble culture (Ziejka 1999; Dopart 2006; Hoffmann-Piotrowska 2017).

Another Polish romanticist who saturated his work with images of his native land was Seweryn Goszczyński (1801-1876). His literary activity focused on the poetic characterization of the lands of today's Ukraine, Galicia and the Tatra Mountains, which he treated as a space emotionally very close to him due to his own biographical fate (Sosnowska 2000). For him, those were the lands that he knew from the stories of older people, tales and legends and from his own life experience. Wanting to present them to a wider audience, he evocatively described the lands of the eastern borderlands of former Poland using the poetics of Romanticism, referring to frenzy, Gothicism and historicism. One of his most important works is the poetic novel *Zamek Kaniowski* (Goszczyński 2002), published in 1828, the plot of which concerns the uprising of the Ukrainian people against the Polish nobility in 1768. In this work, Goszczyński used Ukrainian folklore in an innovative way in the creation of the poetic world. The space of Ukraine is presented here from the perspective of a native resident who tells about ancient history and social injustice, raising the problem of treating local peasants like slaves by wealthy and foreign landowners. More important than the economic context in the poem is the metaphysical aura of historical events. The heroes of the work are subjected to the action of cosmic forces of good and evil. In such a perspective, Ukrainian insurgents, Polish nobility, ordinary farmers or educated people become helpless with their free will or character traits in the face of powerful, irrational and superhuman laws. Ukraine and the native land in Goszczyński's literary images become a land of eternal struggles between good and evil. This territory is saturated with blood and violence, where existence is very intense and very short (Kurska 2003: 19-35; Ławski 2015: 455-478).

Goszczyński's Gothic novel *Król zamczyska* (1842) was written in a similar spirit of fascination with Ukrainian lands. The main character is a comprehensively educated and overly sensitive man who has gone mad due to the loss of freedom in his homeland (Goszczyński 1958). His brooding over the past, great love for his native culture and a huge sense of loss causes the man to alienate himself from his social environment, live among the ruins of a former castle and maintain contact only with his imagination. The protagonist of the novel looks out from the remains of a once



impressive building at the surrounding lands and sees no signs of development, life or joy but only signs of destruction, death and despair. Observing the disintegration of mementoes of the homeland leads the protagonist to self-destruction. The subject of the work becomes a personal and spiritual "ruin", which ultimately leads to his death. The king of the castle, in his ideological message, indicates an extreme form of love for the homeland. The novel also contains the conviction that the loss of freedom and living space leads to the destruction of every person.

The third example of a Polish romantic who subordinated his work to the desire to show the cultural richness of the lost homeland is Wincenty Pol (1807-1872) (Janion 1975: 467-518; Bondos 2018, 7: 130-145). He published the multi-part *Piesn o ziemi naszej* (published in its entirety in 1843), which is a poetic description of Polish lands visited during a specific patriotic journey by Pol (Pol 1922). The work brought the author great popularity and respect. In this case, poetry contributed to a significant increase in interest in native nature and culture in Polish society. Pol's decision to describe in a literary way those lands of the former Polish state that were being independently discovered and scientifically researched was important in the creation of the work. Of course, literary descriptions of journeys were also known to other romantics or writers of earlier eras, but in Wincenty Pol's works, the successively characterized Polish lands convinced readers how vast and fascinating these spaces were: from Lithuania and Samogitia in the north of former Poland to the Carpathians in the south, from Ruthenia (today's Ukraine) in the east to Greater Poland in the west. All these lands were presented as spaces of cultural wealth and diversity of natural resources. The same language dominated everywhere, as did a similar ethos of Slavic hospitality, respect for older generations, and even similar architectural solutions in sacral and secular architecture. Pol's vision of old Poland had the features of a cultural myth, but it must be emphasized that in the 19th century, it fulfilled a unifying function and inspired people to continue thinking about the cultural and spiritual existence of Poland despite external political obstacles. In this way, the poet transferred the existence of the homeland from the material dimension to the scope of the mental life of Poles (Kamionka-Straszakowa 1988; Piersiak, Timofiejew 2007).

For a complete picture of the Romantic view of old Poland, one must also add Wincenty Pol's interest in the ancient and 19th-century Slavic northwest. This is because the poet had literary and scientific ambitions not only for the territory of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth but also for the entire Slavic region. His travels contributed to the creation of literary descriptions of the Baltic Sea area and Slavic lands located between the Oder and the Elbe in the 6th and 11th centuries. Pol wrote about the Oder River and the island of Rugia as lands lost to Polish culture and indicated that this loss should be a warning to the generations of Poles who lived there. He believed that the memory of the homeland should concern not only the epochs that were closest in time but also the Middle Ages or even the epochs when Christianity had not yet taken hold in Central Europe. Only such a perspective allows us to understand the history and development of ethnic elements.

Polish Romantics, keenly interested in Slavic culture, folklore and the cult of the past, created literary images of the homeland as distinct identity and national factors (Bobrownicka 1995; Kowalik 2004). They set off on patriotic journeys across the lands of the former state or, based on their own reading, memories and imagination, published works that made people aware of not only the geographical but also the cultural scope of the influence of the native tradition. Their works were intended to maintain Polish national and historical awareness in a situation of cultural threat from Russian or German culture, giving readers symbolic signs of space. Polish writers described Lithuanian-Belarusian forests as a space of *primaeval* and wild nature, Ukrainian steppes as areas of freedom and liberty, Greater Poland villages and towns as places of remembrance of former medieval rulers, and finally, Mazovia as fields full of rich land and happy farmers (Przybylski 1978; Kowalczykova 1982).

The interest of Polish romantics in what was homely was undoubtedly an expression of longing for freedom, for that which was lost. At the same time, however, these were literary and mythological dreams of a space in which Poles would become free and happy in the future. In such a setting, literature became a compensatory and therapeutic act that allowed to survive the situation of

political and cultural enslavement. The images that were created in romanticism proved productive until the end of the 20th century, becoming part of the symbolic imagination of Poles (Rybicka 2014).

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## **A Discourse of Spiritual Ecosophy in Sri Aurobindo's Poetry**

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**Abstract:** Sri Aurobindo was a prominent philosopher, thinker, yogi, and sage who significantly contributed to India's spiritual renaissance. According to Sri Aurobindo, humans are conscious beings capable of inner evolution through a supra-rational mind. In the contemporary era, "ecosophy" is an ecological philosophy that emphasizes the relationship between literature and the environment and is one of the components of ecocriticism theory. A Norwegian philosopher, Arne Naess, coined the term "Deep Ecology" or "ecosophy," defining it as an environmental philosophy based on eight principles that oppose anthropocentric models of existence. Deep ecology emphasizes that humans must recognize the inherent value of nature over its exclusive usefulness and exploitation. The paper aims to explore a discourse of spiritual ecosophy in Sri Aurobindo's poetry, affirming the recognition of the interrelatedness of life forms through the evolution of self. Sri Aurobindo extensively wrote about the spiritual evolution of humankind. It is a novel worldview that holds the power to mitigate the current ecological degeneration through consciousness evolution. Humanity ought to arrive at a realization of self, as the self is a supra-rational mind with special power to realize the infinite in the finite. This realization fosters an appreciation for the intrinsic value of the diversity of life forms and a new perspective on the relationship between humanity and the natural world. By reconnecting the lower self with the higher self, fostering peaceful co-existence, and cherishing the essence of life forms, Sri Aurobindo's spiritual insights guide by navigating contemporary ecological challenges through the power of supermind.

**Keywords:** Ecosophy, Spiritual Renaissance, Inner Evolution, Self-Realisation, and Inter-Connectedness

## **Deep Ecology: An Overview**

Deep ecology is an environmental philosophy that advocates a new perspective on the relationship between humanity and the natural world. It calls for a transformation of human thought concerning the environment by recognizing the inherent value of nature over its exclusive authority by humans. Also known as an ecosophy of environment, it was articulated and presented by a Norwegian philosopher, Arne Naess, and an American environmentalist, George Sessions, in 1984. The philosophy was a protest against the anthropocentric models of existence in European and American continents, implying that humans have disturbed the natural equilibrium of the world around us. Naess defined 'deep ecology' as an amalgamation of religious ideals and many environmental movements that cornerstones the role of humans in the environment through the development of deep ecological consciousness. This consciousness is crucial to counteract shallow environmentalism and to stress the moral obligation of humans to care for nature. In 1972, Naess and Sessions formulated eight principles that urged the need for a conscious social change in humans. They emphasised the transformation of anthropocentric societies into biocentric ones to maintain diversity and ensure the holistic well-being of ecology.

Deep ecology offers a broader perspective on the metaphysics of the natural world. It emphasises self-realisation that leads to an experience of the interrelatedness of life forms. In this regard, Naess asserts the need for a profound transformation in human attitude to realise the interdependence of life forms. Therefore, self-realisation is a means to become a conscious member of the ecosphere and recognise and realise the beauty and existence of biodiversity. Emphasising the importance of self-realisation, in *The Dragonfly Will Be the Messiah* (2021), Masanobu Fukuoka, a Japanese farmer and philosopher, writes, "No God or Buddha will rescue the human race, and the destruction of nature will lead to the destruction of the human race" (14). Self-realisation is an enterprise from the ego-eco consciousness through identifying oneself with life forms and realising their innate value. Therefore, self-realisation aims to delve into oneself to broaden the perspective of self, recognising the self as a part of the environment that must contribute to the harmony of existence.



### **Spiritual Ecosophy: Sri Aurobindo's Idea of Nature**

Poetry is an ocean to plunge into, while spiritual poetry is a creek, decoding a profound reality of the world around us to enlighten our way by explaining higher truths. Sri Aurobindo, a spiritual revolutionary of the modern age in India, made a far-reaching contribution to human thought by broadening the perspectives of one's knowledge and opening up new vistas of vision through his profound yogic experience. Defining the objective of spirituality as a quest for evolved consciousness, Sri Aurobindo emerged as a poet of consciousness who envisions the manifestation of divine consciousness on earth with a new man, empowering a new civilization through the power of supermind. Sri Aurobindo held a bold view: "The evolution began with the big bang and will bloom into a perfect humanity on earth" (Ganguli x).

Sri Aurobindo's spiritual ecosophy is his spiritual concept of nature based on his yogic experience. The substance of Sri Aurobindo's integral yoga is consciousness, the primary impulse that creates the universe. Explaining consciousness as the only truth and an eternal self of all things, underlying the appearances of animate and inanimate things in the phenomenal world, Sri Aurobindo, in *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, states:

all things are originally one being, but a one who insists on his own infinite diversity, even a suggestion that there is in this eternal unity, an eternal pluralism; the Infinite Being self-repeated in an infinite multiplicity of beings each unique and yet each the One. (279-80)

The law of energy is the immutable sameness at the base with a free, unaccountable variation on the surface. Sri Aurobindo refers to the impulse that produces different things in the world as nature. He also explains that nature's horizontal and vertical movements are nature's yoga. The horizontal movement of nature is the working of consciousness in inanimate matter. The vertical movement of nature implies the release of consciousness from its lower plane to the higher plane. It means that the creation has descended all the degrees of being from the Supermind to matter, and in each degree, it has created a world, a plane, or an order proper to that degree. Sri Aurobindo says, "Creation leaped straight from the hands of God; / Marvel and rapture wandered in the ways" (*Savitri* 124). Fritjof

Capra, in *The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of parallels between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism*, remarked: “Eastern view of the world is organic, for the Eastern Mystic, all things and events perceived by the senses are interrelated, connected, and are but different aspects or manifestation of the same ultimate reality” (29). Sri Aurobindo’s concept of nature is evolutionary, establishing the higher consciousness as a manifestation on earth. His integral yoga promotes a vision of reality called “satyadarshan” (Tyagi 24), which shapes man’s earthly existence through the spiritual evolution of the inner self. Therefore, according to Sri Aurobindo, “All is Sachchidananda” (Ganguli 388).

The primary cause of the environmental crisis is the lack of environmental sensitivity and reverence, leading to a misunderstanding of nature as without essence. Also, humans consider the existence of natural resources for their exclusive use, further contributing to degradation. Deep ecology emphasises the development of an eco-centric perspective, asserting the inclusiveness of ecosystems, watersheds, and landscapes. It highlights the inherent value of life forms, humans and non-humans, essentially with the right to live. The ecosophy of environment stresses the intrinsic worth through the interconnectedness of life forms. It states there is no hierarchy in the web of life, implying the infinite relationship is due to the reliance of everything upon everything else. Deep ecology alludes to the richness and diversity of life, instructing humans to be conscious of their moral obligation towards the environment by acknowledging the right to life and the flourishing of every living entity.

Sri Aurobindo’s conception of nature is spiritually oriented, promoting a profound connection with the environment by awakening our conscience to be more sensitive and mindful of its inner worth. Sri Aurobindo’s ecosophy of nature assists in removing the constitutional self-ignorance through self-knowledge, asserting the innate value of all life forms with the power of supermind. Admitting living intelligence within the environment through the notion of consciousness in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo says, “All things are in Nature, and all things are in God” (44). Also, through the ecosophy of consciousness, Sri Aurobindo explains human life as an essential part

of the ecosphere and insists on developing a holistic view of the world by responding positively to it. Naess's tenets of deep ecology resonate with the spiritual ecosophy of nature as defined by Sri Aurobindo, emphasizing the unity of life forms through recognition of its essence. He promotes critical thinking about the environment's future by asserting the supermind's power behind the matrix of all matter. The paper attempts to untangle Sri Aurobindo's spiritual ecosophy that inspires nature sensitivity through poetry, which prepares the way for moulding earthly life into divine life by integrating material life with the life of the spirit.

Asserting the reality of the eternal self as the essence of all life forms, Sri Aurobindo states: "Life is a legitimate field, an expression of divine in its multiple forms" (Tyagi 126). *Savitri*, the magnum opus of Sri Aurobindo, explicates his heightened consciousness of the philosophy of nature. Additionally, his poems, *The Divine Hearing*, *The Kingdom Within*, *The Hidden Plan*, *A Tree*, *Surrender*, *Rose of God*, *Transformation* to name a few, are his poetic expressions of appreciation of the marvel of nature, which goes beyond the externalities of life, earning him the title of "the greatest intellectual of our age," as said by Dr. Radhakrishnan (Ganguli ix). Spiritual evolution is attaining a unified nature sensibility by recognising life forms' interrelatedness. Thus, Sri Aurobindo's poetry expresses his innate yogic experience, attempting to bring out the myriad expressions of truth which form the basis of different objects in nature.

### **A Discourse of Spiritual Ecosophy in Sri Aurobindo's Poetry**

Integral yoga is the basis of Sri Aurobindo's spiritual ecosophy, as illustrated by his poetry. He calls for a primary change in human nature through a reversal of consciousness that would assist humans to rise above their shallow perception of ecology. Shallow ecology is an anthropocentric mode of life based on the premise that the sole purpose of nature is to serve human needs. It attaches no importance to the right to live and flourish and the intrinsic value of life forms, asserting the usage of nature as an exclusive right of humans. Today, the world has seen unprecedented changes that continue to occur at an ever-increasing pace, emphasising the need for a critical look at the purpose and future of humanity. Science plays a pivotal role in the progress and betterment of human life, culture, and

civilisation. However, regardless of its immense scientific achievements, it fails to provide the integral truth, the inner life and spirit, as “it studies surface laws by surface thought” (Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri* 160). Scientific reasoning has rationalised everything; therefore, untangling the truth behind the apparent phenomena is complex. Sri Aurobindo claims that the scientific inventions declared evolution a spontaneous process, rejecting its spiritual connection. He ironically presents the man's joy in pursuing his lower nature by disregarding his significance in the cosmic order and focusing entirely on material success. Insisting on developing spiritual consciousness, Sri Aurobindo, in the sonnet, *Science and the Unknowable*, rejects the limited scientific approach, as it cannot fathom the concrete truth and states:

Man's science builds abstractions cold and bare  
And carves to formulas the living whole;  
It is a brain and hand without a soul,  
A piercing eye behind our outward stare.  
The objects that we see are not in their form,  
A mass of forces is the apparent shape;  
Pursued and seized, their inner lines escape  
In a vast consciousness beyond our norm. (*Collected Poems* 598)

Sri Aurobindo values the scientific efforts to unfold the secrets of nature. However, he asserts that it limited itself to the matter by ignoring the truth behind the surface of matter. Highlighting the significance of material life designed for evolutionary purposes, Sri Aurobindo in the epic, *Savitri* writes, “There is the truth of which the world's truths are shreds, / The Light of which the world's ignorance is the shade” (661). Criticising the contemporary world, Sri Aurobindo graphically presents the rational man who is dominated by ego-principle, asserting his hollow power and achievements:

I am the heir of the forces of the earth,  
Slowly I make good my right to my estate;  
A growing godhead in her divinised mud,

I climb, a claimant to the throne of heaven.

The last-born of the earth I stand the first; (*Savitri* 511)

One of the principles of deep ecology stresses the cause of environmental crisis by pointing out excessive human interference, as humans believe the entire cosmos is for their use: “For me and my use the universe was made” (*Savitri* 511). The principle states that human interference has harmed the planet more than contributed to its goodness. In *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo states:

Air was invented for my lungs to breathe,  
Conditioned as a wide and wall-less space  
For my winged chariot’s wheels to cleave a road,  
The sea was made for me to swim and sail  
And bear my golden commerce on its back: (512)

Moreover, the modern man is a servant of his blundering ego and rising appetites. The verse underlies the tone of an egoistic man who declares that his achievements make him think they are more significant than nature. Commenting on the boastful approach of modern man in *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo states, “I have grown greater than Nature, wiser than God. / I have made real what she never dreamed, / I have seized her powers and harnessed for my work” (512).

Furthermore, due to ignorance, modern man is obsessed with outer reality and neglects life’s spiritual dimension, which is essential for understanding the self and nature. In *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo presents the ego-consciousness that drives the modern man and says:

No magic can surpass my magic’s skill.  
There is no miracle I shall not achieve.  
What God imperfect left, I will complete,  
...  
His sin and error I will eliminate; (512)

Due to scientific advancements, humanity is fractured by the happenings worldwide, as spiritual connections are severed and snapped. Spiritual paralysis has affected the traditional pillars of moral,

social, and ethical values, thus evading the value of relationships. In *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo states, "... these formulae of Science may be pragmatically correct and infallible, they may govern the practical how of Nature's processes, but they do not disclose the intrinsic how and why..." (299). The scientific disciplines reject the spiritual dimension of existence; therefore, commenting on the touchstone of the logic of sciences, Sri Aurobindo, in *War and Determinism*, writes, "The destiny of the race in this age of crisis and revolution will depend much more on the spirit which we are than on the machinery we shall use..." (1). He proposes to implement the discoveries and inventions of physical science into the opportunity to pursue the discovery of higher truth, diviner spirit, using life for a higher perfection of being over multiplication and expanding collective ego. The objective of physical science is the mechanised unity of material life; however, according to Sri Aurobindo, the aim ought to be "a greater whole-being, whole-knowledge, whole-power to weld all into greater unity of whole-life" (*The Life Divine* 1055).

Addressing the well-being of everything in its own right, the philosophy of deep ecology asserts the right of nature to exist for its beauty and value. The principle is a call for new strategies with a purpose to be implemented by humans, insisting on a complete transformation in the lives of humans. New ideas emphasise how humans should treat the environment, asserting the need to recognise the quality of life over higher living standards, as a good quality of life promotes happiness. Therefore, deep ecology calls for sincere human efforts to implement its principles. In this regard, through his poetical insight, Sri Aurobindo affirms the evolution of consciousness to add potential meaning into existence by connecting humans with nature at a large scale. Sri Aurobindo asserts the need to connect to the root of the matter that sustains life forms, insisting there is more to phenomenal life.

Through self-realisation, Sri Aurobindo's poetry aims to divinise human nature and the world in the transcendental self, the universal spirit of oneness. Self-realisation is to enlarge the realm of knowledge about the world and the inner self, leading to an awareness of mutual inclusiveness and oneness, as "the true knowledge can be made subjectively real by spiritual reflection" (*The Life Divine*

691). Self-realisation promotes a collective vision towards a sustainable and inclusive ecosystem, affirming a shared space with other life forms. It cultivates an ecological self-sensitive to experience nature's joy by tapping the supermind's potential. Ecological self-promotes transformation from anthropocentric living to a state of selflessness, alluding to better individuals who overcome lower possessive self and their greed using natural resources and landscapes. Therefore, Sri Aurobindo calls for a profound transformation at the level of consciousness that goes beyond daily concerns to fulfil our duty towards the environment. Sri Aurobindo's spiritual ecosophy of evolved life coincides with the substance of deep ecology.

Nature is the abode of heavenly essence. It is the creative force of life, which reflects the infinite and inexhaustible. Perceiving divinity in every aspect of nature, Sri Aurobindo gives symbolic expression to the progressive and evolutionary power of nature and states:

All Nature was a conscious front of God:

A wisdom worked in all, self-moved, self-sure,

A plenitude of illimitable Light,

An authenticity of intuitive Truth,

A glory and passion of creative Force. (*Savitri* 324)

Sri Aurobindo glorified nature and its manifestation by recognizing the spiritual significance behind every inanimate and animate life form. The inanimate objects belong to the realm of matter, which expresses hidden divinity, presenting beautiful forms. While appreciating the divine essence permeating the inanimate objects and affirming the interrelatedness between the humans and inanimate objects, in *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo states, "Yet are they instruments of a Will supreme, / Watched by a still all-seeing Eye above" (378). In addition, referring to the all-embracing presence of divinity as a connective force behind all life forms, Sri Aurobindo says:

Thus shall the earth open to divinity

And common natures feel the wide uplift,

Illumine common acts with the Spirit's ray

And meet the deity in common things. (*Savitri* 710)

Sri Aurobindo's poetry expresses eco-consciousness, implying the interrelatedness of life forms. Therefore, the essence of life forms can help a man connect with his inner self. He asserts that raising and extending our insights about the inanimate objects and the inner workings of the spirit means that "a greater power of spirit brings a greater power of life" (*Future Poetry* 205). In this regard, Sri Aurobindo insists on the need for poise and calmness of inner self to comprehend the profound nature's musing through the lines taken from *Savitri*, "The rhythm of the intenser wordless Thought / That gathers in silence behind life, / And the low sweet inarticulate voice of earth / In the great passion of her sun-kissed trance" (380). Sri Aurobindo sensitises humanity to recognise the inner self, which contains the subtle links ignored by science and modern thought. Realising inherent value means refining our conduct to gain insight into consciousness, which gives us an inclusive concept of the beauty of life forms in its widest sense.

Each was a symbol power, a vivid flash

In the circuit of infinities half-known;

Nothing was alien or inanimate,

Nothing without its meaning or its call. (*Savitri* 357)

Sri Aurobindo envisions the inanimate objects manifested in nature possessing life. In *Rose of God*, the rose symbolizes the essence of God through bliss, light, power, life, and love, as integral perfection of God. Bliss is for the human heart; light symbolizes knowledge of the truth that nourishes the human mind with power that sustains the human will and life, and finally, the love to make the earth an excellent dwelling to live. Calling *Rose of God* a revelation of spiritual reality, Sri Aurobindo says:

Rose of God, like a blush of rapture on Eternity's face,

Rose of love, ruby depth of all being, fire-passion of Grace!

Arise from the heart of yearning that sobs in Nature's abyss:

Make earth the home of the Wonderful and life Beatitude's kiss. (*Collected Poems* 564)



Sri Aurobindo's notion of nature is integral as he moves from external to internal appreciation of the value of life forms. He affirms spiritual experience for those who strive to move from the outwardness of life forms and identify with nature profoundly. Recognition and appreciation of all life forms leads to an experience of spiritual oneness developed through love. Sri Aurobindo says:

All time-made difference they overcame;  
The world was fibred with their own heart-strings;  
Close drawn to the heart that beats in every breast,  
They reached the one self in all through boundless love. (*Savitri* 381)

In addition, discussing the role of nature in quenching the spiritual thirst of seekers on the spiritual path, Sri Aurobindo affirms nature, too, follows the dictate of the Supreme will, "... the epic climb / of the human soul from its flat earthly state / to the discovery of a greater self / And the far gleam of an eternal light" (*Savitri* 46). He affirms the feeling of harmony in life and oneness among all creatures accompanies the treasure of the silent hour:

And spent the treasure of a silent hour  
Bathed in the purity of the mild gaze  
That, uninsistent, ruled them from its peace,  
And by its influence found the ways of calm. (*Savitri* 382)

Man has gained knowledge of the laws of nature but has snapped the connection with the essence of existence. In the absence of spirituality, humanity stifles as it neither progresses nor gains knowledge. Therefore, the essence of Sri Aurobindo's integral yoga is realising the wideness of cosmic consciousness. In words of Sri Aurobindo:

Makes all creation deeply intimate:  
A fourth dimension of aesthetic sense  
Where all is in ourselves, ourselves in all,  
To the cosmic wideness re-aligns our souls. (*Savitri* 112)

Sri Aurobindo strives to prepare the path for super-humanity, aiming to transform earthly life into divine life. He insists that man is an evolutionary being with unrealised potential opening up in him. An evolved man can have inclusive experience gained through his raised level of consciousness, the power of supermind. The supermind is the state of consciousness that sees the universe by transforming all the limited and particular, experiencing universal beauty, love, and delight. His poetry expresses the truth of the inner spirit, working in life with a comprehensive vision. Each life form has a value because all are Consciousness-force, which devolves during manifestation, creating many variables of itself, which are spiritual and supra-physical by nature. Asserting the significance of harmony among life forms, in *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo brings out the integration of all aspects of material life with the immaterial life, “United the within and the without / To make of life a cosmic harmony, / An empire of the immanent Divine” (318). Also, he discusses the wisdom formula of consciousness that lasts till eternity as “The thousand-fold expression of the One” (*Savitri* 96).

Thus, deep ecology principles emphasise living a conscious life by developing an awareness of the interrelatedness of life forms through their intrinsic value. Recognition of the oneness of life forms will assist in a better dwelling on earth, promoting a healthy environment for all life forms. Sri Aurobindo’s ecosophy aligns with the deep ecology of Arne Naess, who advocated environmental philosophy as a social movement promoting an egalitarian outlook towards life forms by realising the inherent value of all life. Henceforth, Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual ecosophy of integral yoga guides the modern man in developing the integral vision aimed at the integral progress of man’s being who embraces all life forms. Through the evolution of consciousness, Sri Aurobindo asserts the actualisation of a holistic change of the ecosystem that positively impacts the entire planet.

## **Conclusion**

Today, the entire human civilisation is grappling with the greatest menace of self-destruction caused by the boom of scientific advancements, industrialisation, and deforestation arising out of human greed that majorly contribute to ecological setbacks such as disasters, pollution, and global warming, to name a few. Also, they are the primary reasons prompting the study of deep ecology. Deep ecology

argues for the rightful living of all life forms by recognising the inherent essence, termed the value of life forms. In this regard, the spiritual ecosophy of Sri Aurobindo's poetry is a reformatory way to save the world from the environmental crisis, emphasising the need for the evolution of human consciousness. Self-realisation is the contemplation of self, resonating with ego at a lower level that has done more harm to the planet than preserving it; therefore, Sri Aurobindo advises self-evolution for establishing a habitable place for all life forms. Self-realisation aims at uniting humanity by unveiling the power of the super-mind. His poetry sensitises humanity to the wisdom of nature to establish a balance between nature and human actions for a sustainable future.

“All life is yoga” (Ganguli 333), as said by Sri Aurobindo, prepares the ground for spiritual evolution by implanting a vision of integral life. He believed in all life as essentially one in essence and insisted on humans to serve and preserve the biosphere, which will serve humanity in the long run. Sri Aurobindo has left for posterity a philosophy of living a meaningful life through individual morality with a profound commitment towards the environment through the realisation of the potential of the supermind. Henceforth, the evolution of human consciousness can bring optimism for our tomorrow.

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## **A Girl, a Cat, and a Chair across Ruins: Nature, Landscape, and the Construction of Identity in *Suzume no Tojimari***

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**Abstract:** Makoto Shinkai's Golden Globe-nominated animated film, *Suzume no Tojimari* (2022) emphasises the impact of human activities on the landscape, reflecting broader themes of environmental responsibility. This paper analyses how Shinkai's poignant narrative intertwines identity with the landscape, capturing how natural locations become integral to one's memory and the ever-changing tapestry of human experience. According to Sam Turner, the interaction between people and landscapes is a dynamic process that simultaneously shapes human societies and is influenced by them. Suzume's journey through various landscapes nationwide to stop the mythical worm from causing a national environmental mishap akin to the 3/11 disaster mirrors her journey of discovering a human being's place within the natural world. While the recurring motif of ruins clinging onto the memories of their past inhabitants establishes abandoned places as active reservoirs of emotions, the critique of anthropocentric beliefs encapsulated by the chant that prevents disasters marks the impudence of claiming nature under human ownership. As a young girl travels through different environments with a cursed talking chair and the cat Daijin, a kami (spirit being), she discovers the interconnectedness of landscapes, people, and the natural world, and how these interactions shape identities—both individual and communal. Besides exploring how personal growth and self-discovery are intertwined with the natural and cultural environments, this paper also aims to examine how Shinkai's film, set in the backdrop of the Tohoku triple disaster, uses nature and landscapes to reinforce a shared sense of national and cultural identity.

**Keywords:** Landscape, Identity, Trauma, National Identity, Animated Film, Ecocriticism, Human-Non-Human Relationship

Makoto Shinkai's Golden Globe-nominated animated film *Suzume no Tojimari* (2022) captures the journey of the young protagonist Suzume across the Japanese archipelago in a desperate attempt to prevent a catastrophic earthquake by sealing mystical doors located in the middle of ruins. The film, literally translated as "Suzume's Locking/Shutting up," presents a young high school girl who accidentally unlocks a mysterious door, unleashing the worm—a mythical creature that causes disastrous earthquakes. Along with Souta, the designated closer of these doors and a mischievous cat, Daijin, Suzume encounters various abandoned places, each rich with cultural memory and environmental significance on her journey, and it is through the interactions of these characters with diverse terrains from rural areas to urban landscapes, to finally at the heart of Tokyo, Shinkai's work engages in cultural storytelling that serves both as a medium for ecophilic introspection and identity reconstruction. By exploring the intricate narratives of human experience and the sense of both individual and shared identity, the film reflects the dynamic relationship between humans and nature. As Souta gets cursed by a capricious cat, Daijin and turned into a three-legged chair, the narrative captures Suzume's journey across various locations throughout Japan, accompanied by the sentient chair and the mischievous cat that collectively contribute to Suzume's understanding of her identity and her place in the world. Through the diverse locations acting as active repositories of collective memories and experiences, Shinkai constructs a shared national identity rooted in the symbiotic relationship between people and their environment. The film's portrayal of landscapes as integral to human experience and memory reflects a cultural ethos that sees the natural world as central to the Japanese identity while itself attempting to redefine what this unique national identity is. Thus, Shinkai's poignant narrative intertwines identity, individual as well as cultural, with the landscape, capturing how natural locations become integral to one's memory and the ever-changing tapestry of human experience.

The spatial domains that individuals occupy, alongside their engagements with various contextual environments—such as socio-economic status, religious beliefs, and gender dynamics play a crucial role in forming personal and collective identities as individuals derive substantial aspects of

their identity from the landscapes they inhabit. Recent scholarship has established that the concept of landscape transcends mere geographical delineation, embodying the intricate interplay of natural and human elements. As articulated by Sam Turner, landscape has evolved into an integral component of material culture, dynamically influencing and being influenced by human-nature interactions (Turner 387). This phenomenon, referred to as landscape identity, is a complex synthesis of biophysical characteristics and socio-cultural dimensions, reflecting the deep interconnections between people and their environments. The notion of landscape identity represents both a social and personal construct, wherein the physical attributes of the environment serve as essential elements (Stobbelaar & Pedroli 322-3). In the construction of individual and collective identity, geological elements gain additional dimensions through their associations with memories and socio-political structures, thereby becoming integral to the formation of cultural and national identities. The 3/11 disaster in Japan profoundly affected people's perception of their physical surroundings, heightening awareness of the transience of everyday life within their cherished homeland. This catastrophe, partially caused by the disruption of the order of the natural world through human exploration and exploitation, engendered a collective sense of helplessness—an anxiety deeply rooted in their geographic position. As argued by Catherine Brace, landscapes can be represented to articulate the established order and naturalise national power by providing a quasi-physical manifestation of the nation, thus solidifying what Benedict Anderson termed the “imagined community” (Brace 127-9). *Suzume no Tojimari* aims to manufacture a sense of identity by defamiliarizing landscapes and the interactions between the human and non-human world to reinforce a sense of national identity against the backdrop of the shared trauma wrought by natural disasters. Shinkai's narrative intertwines personal and national identities with landscapes, emphasising the idea of the interconnectedness of human beings, non-human creatures, the natural world, and the nation.

Suzume's journey navigating through different regions of the nation to avert the impending destruction caused by the worm portrays the physicality of landscapes as reflective and inductive of societal and environmental harmony. Shinkai highlights the Japanese concept of *musubi* to illustrate

the interconnectedness and unity among humans, nature, and non-sentient objects, emphasising the necessity of maintaining harmony. Musubi, central to the Shinto worldview, underscores the reciprocal relationships between all elements of existence. Suzume's interactions with the spirit of nature Daijin who is a playful cat, and a cursed chair that was once the human being Souta, highlight the interconnectedness of sentient and non-sentient beings emphasising the Shinto belief in the unity of all things. Suzume's journey through various landscapes—from rural towns to bustling cities—exemplifies the multidimensional connections between humans and the natural world with each landscape serving as a site of continuous interaction which becomes essential for Suzume's personal growth and environmental stewardship. Resisting anthropocentric egotism of being the “saviour” of nature, Shinkai points out that human efforts to save nature are but acts of modesty and respect for the inherent value of all beings, sentient and non-sentient alike, as human beings are not masters of nature but members of the larger community of life (Gossin 211). Even as Suzume and Souta prevent the worm from causing another disaster, the film underscores that nature's right to exist is independent of the value humans may ascribe to it. This sentiment is captured by the prayer the characters chant while concealing the worm, “O divine kami who dwell beneath this land... You have long protected us for generations... Thy mountains and rivers that we have long called our own... We return them to you!” (Bardon 37). This chant of modesty and surrender to nature halts the worm emphasising the futility of anthropocentric views that destroy the natural order of existence. Shinkai's use of musubi in *Suzume no Tojimari* thus serves as a commentary on the interconnectedness of life, encouraging a harmonious coexistence that respects the intrinsic worth of all elements within the natural world. Through vivid depictions of Japan's diverse landscapes, the film creates a unified vision of a nation deeply rooted in the principles of interconnectedness and mutual respect. Thus, the narrative illustrates the essence of human relationships with nature, portraying these relationships as crucial for understanding one's place in both society and the world.

Shinkai skilfully incorporates the Japanese folkloric concept of a giant subterranean worm, believed to cause earthquakes, to explore the interconnectedness of human and natural worlds and



foreground the constant threat posed by natural disasters in Japan. The portrayal of the worm emphasises the critical importance of harmony between humans and nature as the worm's destructive potential, accidentally unleashed by Suzume, presents the dire consequences of thoughtless human manipulation of nature. The film employs the worm to personify and recontextualise natural disasters, infusing the story with a sense of mythic realism while highlighting nature's latent and unpredictable power. The mythical quality is further emphasised by the depiction of Daijin and Sadaijin, two spiritual entities embodying kami. In Shinto belief, kami are spirits that inhabit natural elements, objects, and phenomena, governing the natural world and influencing human life. Shinkai integrates this concept through Daijin and Sadaijin, who play crucial roles in Suzume's journey and the narrative's exploration of human and non-human relationships. Daijin and Sadaijin serve as keystones in ensuring the closure of the doors and preventing the worm from escaping the land of the afterlife. They personify the harmonious relationship between humans and nature. However, Shinkai avoids reducing these characters to mere anthropomorphised figures by presenting Daijin as both a force of chaos and a key to balance. This duality reflects the traditional Shinto view of kami as beings that can be both benevolent and malevolent, depending on their interactions with humans and the environment. Through these characters, Shinkai underscores the necessity of maintaining balance and respect in the relationship between humanity and the natural world. Daijin embodies the unpredictable and multifaceted nature of spiritual forces, guiding Suzume while also challenging her understanding of both the natural and supernatural realms. Analysing Shinkai's choice of a cat as a representative of nature, Asha Bardon draws the parallel that cats, like nature in Shinkai's world, are unpredictable and cannot be entirely domesticated (Bardon 47-8). Daijin's health and spirit fluctuate with Suzume's affection, commenting on how nature is constantly affected by human interaction—he becomes malnourished and depressed when Suzume chides him but regains his health and spirit on receiving her affection. Both Daijin and Sadaijin illustrate the dynamic relationship between humans and nature and the need for balance. The transformation of Souta into a three-legged chair due to Daijin's curse

further highlights the theme of imbalance brought about by human actions. It is only through restoring balance that Souta's curse is ultimately broken, and he regains his human form.

In *Suzume no Tojimari*, ruins play a pivotal role in illustrating the intricate relationship between humanity and nature. These ruins are not merely projections of human activity but serve as significant motifs within the film, weaving together notions of abandonment, memory, and identity. The narrative ties these forsaken spaces, which have grown in Japan over recent decades as a means to the gates leading to the liminal realm of the afterlife. At the outset of the film, Suzume's encounter with Souta prompts her to explore an abandoned site, where she inadvertently unleashes the catastrophic worm, thus initiating her journey across various neglected locations in Japan, accompanied by the sentient chair and the capricious cat. The visits to deserted places such as the abandoned school, theme park, and an underground station in Tokyo are crucial narrative elements that offer the audience insights into the histories embedded within these structures. The ruins emerge as repositories of collective memory, reflecting both natural and human-induced calamities. To contain the chaos and restore order, Suzume must connect with and acknowledge the memories of the former inhabitants that these spaces still hold. In doing so, the film presents the ruins not only as remnants of human activity but as active sites of memory and identity. These abandoned locations, shaped by both natural and anthropogenic forces, highlight the dynamic relationship between humanity and the natural world. They serve as multivocal points of interaction where the identities of both people and places are constantly reproduced and transformed. By exploring these neglected spaces, Suzume's journey underscores the importance of remembering and honouring the past as a means to navigate and reconcile with the present, thereby reinforcing a collective identity grounded in shared history and experience. Thus, these ruins are depicted not simply as vestiges of bygone human activities but as active storehouses of memory, contributing to the formation and evolution of collective identity. At both the narrative's beginning and end, Suzume crosses into the ultimate ruin—the liminal land of the afterlife. This world-sized ruin, overtaken by nature with moss-covered houses and a ship stranded by the tide, represents a stark departure from anthropocentric spaces. Described

as a realm where “time in its entirety... The stars, then sunset, and the morning sky. Within that realm, it was as though all time had melted together in the sky,” this space embodies the ultimate dissolution of human influence and the dominance of the natural world (Bardon 38). This space embodies the absolute dominance of the natural world devoid of humanity, as it is mentioned that here, no human life is possible. Here, the worm, symbolising nature’s more destructive forces, roams freely, underscoring the tension between human order and natural chaos. *Suzume no Tojimari* employs the concept of ruins to articulate that landscapes are in a perpetual state of flux, shaped by and shaping human experiences. Abandoned by their inhabitants, these landscapes transform into dynamic points of interaction between humans and the natural world, where both individual and collective identities are perpetually redefined.

Japan’s frequent exposure to seismic activity profoundly influences its cultural narratives, which often reflect a deep respect as well as apprehension for nature’s power and a keen awareness of humanity’s vulnerability. The Tohoku triple disaster of March 2011, comprising a 9.0 magnitude earthquake and a devastating tsunami followed by the catastrophic meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, profoundly reshaped the collective consciousness and cultural landscape of Japan, instigating a deep-seated reflection on their vulnerability to natural and man-made catastrophes. Following the Second World War bombings, the Fukushima nuclear disaster, one of the most significant nuclear accidents since Chernobyl, exposed critical flaws in Japan’s disaster preparedness and nuclear safety protocols, prompting a re-evaluation of energy policies and fuelling anti-nuclear movements. On one hand, the disaster highlighted the authorities’ inadequate preparedness, adding to the growing distrust towards governmental figures. On the other hand, it also fostered a sense of solidarity among the general populace, strengthened by the collective experience of grief and subsequent recovery efforts. This shared trauma prompted profound introspection regarding humanity’s relationship with nature and the implications of technological advancement. The disaster brought forth vulnerabilities within societal and infrastructural frameworks, demanding a re-evaluation of national priorities and values. The Tohoku disaster significantly reinvigorated

societal values of community resilience and mutual aid, as Japanese citizens, initially perceived as isolated in their plight, united in response to the calamity. This collective solidarity amid adversity is mirrored in post-3/11 Japanese literature, film, and art, which recurrently address themes of loss, memory, and renewal.

As Timo Thelen notes, the 3/11 catastrophe has ascended to the status of national trauma not merely due to the disaster's magnitude, but because it has been socially constructed as such, thereby consequently shaping public discourse and cultural production and highlighting the enduring human spirit in the face of immense adversity (Thelen 224). Within popular culture, the disaster is recontextualised to cultivate both a culture of fear and uncertainty and to forge a centralised understanding of the relationship between the populace and their land. Shinkai's narrative addresses this national trauma through Suzume's personal trauma of losing her mother in the 3/11 tragedy and the fear of losing Souta and multiple other people to a similar disaster on the account that she fails to stop the worm. In the film, the mythical worm's emergence through the door accidentally unlocked by the young high school girl triggering a devastating earthquake at the film's outset, foregrounds the ever-present national fear. Suzume, then, must embark on a mission to prevent the worm from emerging through various doors scattered across the Japanese archipelago and restore the order she disrupted. This quest underscores the human aspiration to comprehend and mitigate natural forces, reflecting a cultural reverence for nature and the delicate balance required to avert catastrophic destruction. *Suzume no Tojimari*, then, forges a cathartic experience for both the characters and the audience as the catastrophe is shown to be contained by human endeavour and the sheer courage of a young Japanese girl.

Analysing the objectives and impacts of post-3/11 Japanese cinema, Thelen argues that these films often provide an element of "healing" and offer a form of emotional catharsis for the audiences (Thelen 215-7). Besides curating a similar sense of wish-fulfilment, Shinkai's film reinforces the trope of Nihonjinron or a homogenised "Japanese Spirit" by employing the nation's diverse landscapes. Suzume's journey across the Japanese archipelago to prevent another Tohoku-like disaster showcases

the nation's geographical diversity. The film begins with a scene reminiscent of the Tohoku earthquake, before shifting to the tranquil town of Miyazaki Prefecture, characterised by calm seas and mountains. Following her encounters with Souta and Daijin, Suzume travels by ferry to Shikoku and through Ehime, before hitchhiking through rural Honshu to Kobe. She then takes the Shinkansen bullet train to Tokyo and eventually returns to her hometown in Iwate, passing through the Kanto and Tohoku regions. Shinkai vividly depicts various Japanese landscapes: the seaside tranquillity of Miyazaki, the rural charm of Kobe enhanced by her interaction with Chika Amabe, the vibrant nightlife of Ehime where Suzume works at a bar, and the bustling metropolitan life of Tokyo with its skyscrapers and bullet trains. Shinkai skilfully depicts the differences between the spaces through the indoor spaces and food. At the beginning of the film, we see Suzume having breakfast at her home in front of the television while her aunt Tamaki prepares food in the spacious kitchen. Chika Amabe's traditional Japanese house in Kobe with both the girls adorned in traditional yukata appears in stark contrast to the cramped kitchen of Rumi Ninomiya's bar at Ehime with the two women wearing flashy western clothes and the small apartment room of Souta in Tokyo where Suzume literally and symbolically steps into Souta's boots. Despite the distinctiveness of each landscape, they collectively contribute to Suzume's understanding of her identity and place in the society while simultaneously shaping the varied landscapes and practices as cultural signifiers of a unified nation. Since World War II, Japan has strived to construct a unique national identity, with the 3/11 disaster becoming a part of Japan's collective trauma and the narrative of a resilient nation. The concept of "Japanese Spirit" or Nihonjinron has emerged through popular culture, portraying Japan as unique among nations. Shinkai skilfully uses diverse landscapes to create a cohesive image of Japan, where individually varied regions form a unified picture of the nation. These landscapes are not mere settings but integral components that infuse the mental and material worlds, allowing both the protagonist and the audience to experience and understand the interconnectedness of the world and the nation.

The film intricately explores the themes of environmental awareness, individual belonging, and the forging of a national identity through the lens of natural calamities and landscapes. Shinkai aims to influence the younger generation to develop a more eco-centric relationship with the environment. This intention is evident in Suzume's interaction with Souta's grandfather at the hospital. Hitsujiro views Souta's transformation into a keystone as a noble sacrifice, but Suzume, who lost her mother to a natural disaster, sees it as a tragic loss of youth—something she is determined to amend. Suzume's journey across various Japanese landscapes, interactions with diverse individuals, and development of a sense of community enable her to process her trauma, avert the disaster, and save Souta. Young people, disillusioned by the middle-class ideals of the earlier generations, seek to find balance in a precarious world, and thus, they are the ones who embody resilience and a newfound sense of ecological responsibility, suggesting a way forward in the face of environmental challenges in Shinkai's narrative. This is further marked by the general obliviousness of the populace to the looming environmental catastrophe, mirroring real-world apathy. After Suzume inadvertently releases the worm, only she and Souta can perceive the impending threat, while others remain ignorant. However, even though clueless themselves, the people Suzume interacts with choose to believe her and help her in her attempt thereby ultimately saving Japan unknowingly. Shinkai's narrative underscores the emotional precariousness of late modern, industrialised societies and presents empathy and sense of community as the only way in finding one's foot in this growingly unstable society.

The film, set against the backdrop of the 2011 triple disaster, utilises the protagonist Suzume's journey to explore themes of collective trauma and healing and while doing so, Shinkai delineates a process of identity formation that resonates deeply with "Japaneseness", a concept encapsulating shared experiences of natural disasters and the profound connection to the environment. The portrayal of the journey through the archipelago reflects not just her personal growth but also the necessity of moving towards ecological as well as communal harmony in the process and highlights the need to acknowledge and respect the power and unpredictability of nature, promoting a symbiotic relationship

between humans and their environment. The film uses sentimental fantasy to express a sense of national identity, aiming to reclaim essential elements of Japanese culture by transforming the relationship between individuals and the natural world into a cultural identifier. Through Suzume's interactions with various environments, Shinkai presents landscapes as dynamic spaces under continuous construction rather than static entities. These evolving landscapes reflect and shape social life, underscoring how human interactions and experiences influence the form and perception of natural spaces (Robertson & Richards 07). This approach reflects a broader cultural ethos where the natural world is not just a backdrop for human activity but a vital, active participant in shaping cultural and personal identities thereby itself transforming into a cultural signifier. *Suzume no Tojimari* positions the landscape as a central character in the story of national identity formation and Suzume's quest becomes a metaphor for Japan's collective effort to navigate and reconcile with its historical as well as environmental realities while attempting to manufacture a unified national identity rooted in the symbiotic relationship between human, non-human, nature, and culture.

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## **Nature's Role in the Healing Journeys of Young Adults in Creech's *Walk Two Moons***

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**Abstract:** The present study examines nature's role in the healing journeys of young adults in Sharon Creech's *Walk Two Moons*. It scrutinizes how natural environments and landscapes support the emotional growth of young adults. It also unearths how nature acts as a source of solace and healing for the young adult protagonist, particularly Salamanca (Sal) in the novel. This paper argues that Sal's journey across the country with her grandparents stands instrumental in coping with her mother's disappearance and death. It further argues that Sal's ever-changing, majestic, and serene surroundings have healing properties and help to stabilize her volatile emotional condition. It thus concludes that landscapes serve as an agency in Sal's self-discovery, emotional healing, psychological growth, physical healing and spiritual renewal. For these purposes, this study employs the insights of Lawrence Buell about the representation of nature in literature to influence the characters' healing journeys, Erik Erikson regarding developmental psychology that provides a framework for understanding the emotional growth and identity formation of young adult characters, and Carl Jung about psychological theories of healing and growth that offer a deep psychological perspective on the protagonist's journeys. Finally, this study aims to pave the way for future investigations into the interaction between young adults and nature, particularly how teenagers may play a key role in protecting the environment and earth's remnants for coming generations.

**Keywords:** Healing Journeys, Nature and Landscapes, Y/A, Identity and Emotional Growth

### **Introduction**

*Walk Two Moons* (1994), a most critically acclaimed novel by Sharon Creech, incorporates the account of thirteen-year-old young adult protagonist Salamanca (Sal), who travels to Lewiston in

search of her disappeared mother. During her tour to Lewiston with her grandparents, Sal encounters the enchanting and panoramic beauty of landscapes. She finds herself different in her emotional and physical growth. Reaching her destination, Sal heals her grief and loss. She finds herself different but natural. Motivated by Sal's metamorphosis, the research endeavours to address the following questions: Does the nature stand as a healing force in Sal's difficult times as a young adult? How does nature bolster the emotional and physical growth of adolescents? What type of relationship do young adults have with nature? These questions will be analyzed in *Walk Two Moons* .

The term "healing journey" describes the process of getting over a physical, psychological, or emotional trauma. It frequently entails the quest for inner serenity, personal development, and self-discovery. This path is commonly portrayed in literature through the experiences and changes that a character goes through as s/he faces and overcomes suffering, which frequently results in increased comprehension, acceptance, and emotional fortitude. Carl Jung considers 'individuation' as a form of healing journey in *Man and His Symbols*. He argues, "The individuation process is more than a coming to terms between the inborn germ of wholeness and the outer acts of fate. Its subjective experience conveys the feeling that some supra-personal force is actively interfering in a creative way" (162). It means that the process of individuation entails more than just accepting the relationship between the external act of fate and the innate seed of wholeness. Its idiosyncratic understanding gives the impression that a creative, supra-personal power is actively interfering. Similarly, Louise Hay has written about healing in relation to self-love and the power of positive thinking in *You Can Heal Your Life*. Hay contends, "Awareness is the first step in the healing of changing" (49). She further claims, "The process of loving the self" (77) supports healing the issues confronted by the individuals.

In 1957, the American Library for Teenagers first used the term "young adult" to describe individuals between the ages of twelve and eighteen. On the other hand, individuals up to the age of twenty-five are referred to as young adults in the social sciences, management, and development studies. A young adult theorist, Karen Coats defines the term as "a threshold condition, a liminal state

that is fraught with angst, drama, and change anxiety” (325) in “Young Adult Literature: Growing Up, In Theory.” Coats means that adolescence is a transitional phase marked by drama, change anxiety, and emotional turmoil. Young adulthood is characterized by role confusion, identity exploration, emotional instability, rapid physical growth, and ambition, notwithstanding these divergent classifications. This paper largely uses the theories of Carl Jung about psychological theories as emotional and physical healing powers, Erik Erikson regarding psychological development, and Lawrence Buell about literary representations of nature as theoretical frameworks to investigate the aforementioned concerns.

*Walk Two Moons* has received various critical responses following its publication in 1994. Dennis J. Sumara analyses the fictionalizing acts, reading, and the making of identity in the contexts of *Walk Two Moons*. In “Fictionalizing Acts: Reading and the Making of Identity,” Sumara asserts, “Salamanca understands that in order for her to make sense of her present situation, she must engage in the hard work of symbolising what she remembers of her past” (203-4). He intends that Salamanca is aware that she needs to put in a lot of effort to re-symbolize the memories of her past in order to make sense of her current circumstances. Sumara further claims, “For Salamanca, identity is not something that is finally achieved; it is continually created with their ever-shifting circumstances” (204). For Salamanca, identity is a constant process of creation amidst their constantly changing surroundings rather than something that is ultimately attained.

Connecting the novel with Native American contexts, Michelle Pagni Stewart argues contentious issues in “Judging Authors by the Color of Their Skin? Quality Native American Children's Literature.” Stewart contends, “*Walk Two Moons* brings aspects of Native American literary traditions to a text with a Native American protagonist. In so doing, Creech has found herself embroiled in the ethnic literature debate because she is not Native American” (180). With a Native American protagonist, *Walk Two Moons* incorporates elements of Native American literary traditions into the story. Because Creech is not Native American, she has become involved in the ethnic literary controversy. Adding further clues of *Walk Two Moons* on the Native American heritage, Stewart

emphasises, “*Walk Two Moons* should not be dismissed as a "politically correct" choice but instead be recognised for its contribution to multi-cultural children's literature” (187). *Walk Two Moons* is a valuable addition to multicultural children's literature, and its selection should not be discounted as a "politically correct" one.

Associating with Stewart, Rachel Anne Roloff and Brittany R. Collins depict Native American characters illustrated through *Walk Two Moons* in “From Campus to Classroom.” They explicate, “The native American populations that have been silenced for years. They met the Common Core State Standards and the learning targets set up by the required curriculum. Most importantly, they began to ask questions” (87). They considered the Native American communities, who had been marginalised for a long time, severely. They fulfilled both the mandatory curriculum's learning objectives and the Common Core State Standards. Most significantly, they started posing queries.

Departing from Native American contexts, W. A. Senior unfolds the panorama of grief and loss in “Defending the Fantastic-Redux.” Senior admits, “*Walk Two Moons* is the book of grim, depressing, and ultimately pessimistic tales of abuse, alcoholism, death, prostitution, and so on” (97). He means that it contains gloomy, melancholy, and ultimately hopeless stories about prostitution, drunkenness, abuse, and other related topics. Partially, joining with the ideas of Senior, Tony Tendero plugs the novel to the quest for application, translation and participation in Native American heritage in “*Walk Two Moons: A Quest for Application, Translation and Participation.*” Tender underscores, that it “refers to the idea that we must walk in another person’s shoes before we can really understand him or her. This is how Sal starts to figure out the things that matter” (489). Sal attempts to unearth the way that matters to her grief and loss.

Upon reviewing various critical viewpoints on *Walk Two Moons* that are currently available, it is evident that none of the critics have conducted a thorough analysis linking the idea of nature with young adults' therapeutic journeys. So, this paper aims at analyzing it within the ambit of what issues adolescents confront in general while growing up and how natural landscapes engage to shape the troubled emotions of Sal in the novel.

Examining the aforementioned critical reviews and research gap, this study employs a qualitative research approach based on close reading and interpretation of the primary text. It incorporates Carl Jung's psychological theories of healing and growth that offer a deep psychological perspective on the protagonists' journeys, Erik Erikson's developmental psychology which provides a framework for understanding the emotional growth and identity formation of young adult characters, and Lawrence Buell's perspective about how representations of nature in literature influence the characters' healing journeys.

Carl Jung's psychological theories on healing and growth primarily focus on individuation, the self, archetypes, synchronicity, collective unconsciousness and dream analysis. For this purpose, Jung explores his ideas in *Man and His Symbols* published in 1964. He contends, "Man uses the spoken or written word to express the meaning of what he wants to convey" (20). For Jung, the spoken or written word is a means through which the conscious mind articulates thoughts, emotions and ideas. The unconscious mind communicates through symbols, images and archetypes along with universal patterns and themes that transcend individual experience. He further writes, "Man also produces symbols unconsciously and spontaneously in the form of dreams" (21). Jung theorises that the unconscious mind, which holds thoughts, feelings and memories not readily accessible to the conscious mind, uses symbols as a language to express itself. These symbols often emerge in dreams where the conscious mind is relaxed, and the unconscious mind manifests more freely. Symbols in dreams and unconscious expressions provide guidance. The individuals can gain insights that guide them through difficult life situations or decisions, aiding their healing journeys.

Extending the theoretical perspectives to analyse the healing journeys of young adults, Erik Erikson's developmental psychology functions as a tool to intensify the issues of growth and identity of adolescents. Erikson introduces the layers of growth of human beings in "Eight Ages of Man." He has reviewed eight ages of man. According to him, basic trust vs basic mistrust, autonomy vs shame and doubt, initiative vs guilt, industry vs inferiority, identity vs role confusion, intimacy vs isolation, generativity vs stagnation and ego integrity vs despair stand in the form of a tussle in the process of

emotional and physical growth of human beings. Among these stages, this paper incorporates the stage of identity vs. role confusion that deals with the issues of young adults. This stage unfolds the conflict between the adolescents' identity and their role confusion. Erikson argues, "With the advent of puberty, childhood comes to an end and youth begins" (233-4). The childhood stage comes to an end when a person reaches around twelve to thirteen years old. Then, the young adulthood characteristics appear in the person's life. He further elaborates, "In searching for the social values which guide identity, one therefore confronts the problems of ideology and aristocracy" (236). One thus encounters the issues of aristocracy and ideology while looking for the social ideals that shape identity. That person is none other than an adolescent.

Integrating the myriad issues of emotional and physical growth of adolescents, Lawrence Buell further adds the milieus of how the representation of nature in literature supports in the healing journeys of young adults precisely in *Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. Buell explores primarily American literature, especially nature writing which shapes our understanding of the environment and human experiences within it. His discussions on the therapeutic and transformative aspects of nature could provide valuable insights for the analysis of nature's role in the healing journeys of young adults in the novel *Walk Two Moons*. He affirms, "Nature has been reckoned a crucial ingredient of the American ego" (33). Nature stands as an essential component of the American ego. American pastoral representation cannot be pinned to a single ideological position. Buell affirms, "Indigenes use pastoral for their counterhegemonic ends" (63). Native Americans employ pastoral for their own subversive purposes. They even employ nature for rebellious resolutions. Nature is not just a passive element but an active participant in the narrative, offering solace and clarity. He asserts, "A landscape of much richer personal and social memory, both mystic and secular, might have suggested itself" (257). It means that it is possible that a considerably deeper societal and personal memory—both religious and secular—would have emerged naturally.

Assimilating the perspectives of Jung, Erikson and Buell, Analysis of Nature's Role in the Healing Journeys of Young Adults in *Walk Two Moons* becomes stronger and more convincing. The psychological theories of Jung underline the path to understanding the emotional growth of the protagonist Sal. Similarly, Erikson's developmental psychology theories support to strengthen the analysis of the novel by unearthing different stages of man, particularly adolescents' identity and role confusion. His scrutiny adds some issues to explore the identity of Sal. Further, Buell's perspectives strengthen our understanding of how nature stands as a force for Sal to heal her grief and loss as a result of her mother's disappearance and death.

### **Healing Journeys of Sal in *Walk Two Moons***

Creech's *Walk Two Moons*, a young adult novel, projects a thirteen years old Salamanca's (Sal's) journey to Lewiston, Idaho, accompanied by her grandparents, Gram and Gramps, in an attempt to ease her pain and suffering following the desertion and demise of her mother. *Walk Two Moons* is a metaphor for understanding someone else's experiences or emotions by imagining oneself in their place. Being a teenager, Sal wobbles with the emotional turmoil and upheavals. She needs an inviting and supportive atmosphere to guide her emotions into a stable state. Jung believes that nature often symbolizes deeper layers of psychology connected to the collective unconscious. Jung explicates, "For the sake of mental stability and psychological health, the conscious and unconscious must be integrally connected and thus move on parallel lines" (52). It implies that the conscious and unconscious minds need to be closely related and travel in parallel directions in order to maintain psychological health and mental stability.

Uniting Jung's principles, the natural environment in *Walk Two Moons* can be understood as an outward representation of Sal's internal psychological terrain. The trip through various landscapes is symbolic of Sal's journey into her unconscious, where she faces her most intense desires, fears, and memories. The archetypal symbols of nature, such as rivers, mountains, and trees, reflect her inner struggle and guide her in the direction of recovery. Nature often represents the archetypes of rebirth or renewal. Sal responds, "The Black hills, Mount Rushmore, the Badlands- the only card that is still

hard for me to read” (183). As Sal moves through various natural environments, she undergoes a psychological transformation, moving from a state of grief and loss to one of acceptance and growth. Then she admits, “If I was walking in Phoebe’s moccasins, I would want to believe in a lunatic and an axe-wielding Mrs Cadaver to explain my mother’s disappearance” (182). She understood the fate endured by Phoebe and accepted her mother’s disappearance. She develops herself into another phase of psychological venture. She transforms from the unconscious to the conscious state of mind.

Exploring the unconsciousness of the individuals, storytelling taps the collective unconsciousness that allows individuals to survey universal themes and symbols that resonate deeply with the psyche as Jung argues, “Man uses spoken word to express the meaning of what he wants to convey” (20). It hints that humans communicate with each other by speaking words that transmit meaning. In a similar vein, while travelling, Sal recounts her grandparents the tale of her crazy friend Phoebe Winterbottom and Phoebe's mother, who vanishes. Additionally, Sal has flashbacks in both tales that recount Momma's departure for Lewiston around a year earlier. Sal reports, “Instantly, Phoebe Winterbottom came to mind. There was certainly a hog’s bellyful of things to tell about her. I could tell you an extensively strange story” (5). The narration of Phoebe’s story reinforces Sal to control her emotional volatility. Sal draws a comparison between the absence of her mother and Phoebe's mother. The storytelling and landscapes stimulate her to accept her mother’s death.

Connecting psychology with adolescents, teenager Sal is unnerved with her identity and the role she has to perform as Erikson theorizes that developmental psychology by dividing it into eight ages of man. Erikson believes that human beings face different stages in the process of growth. When the person reaches the stage of young adulthood, he/she confronts the identity and role. He argues, “The adolescent mind is essentially a mind of moratorium, a psychological stage between childhood and adulthood, and between the morality learned by the child, and ethics to be developed by the adult” (236). He clarifies that adolescents' minds are fundamentally in a state of moratorium, a psychological transition between childhood and maturity as well as between the morals that children acquire and the ethics that adults will create. In the same way, Sal seems to be confused in her role and identity



after her mother's missing followed by death. She remembers her struggle to understand her mother's decision. And she discloses, "She did not tell me where she was leaving. She kissed me and said, 'I will call you in a few days. But she did not call. I thought she might come back, but she didn't, and I didn't know what to think. Did I do something wrong? Was it my fault?'" (37). Sal is somewhat perplexed by her mother's departure. She stands in a state of indecisiveness.

Sal delves much further into her emotions following her mother's passing. She admits that she wondered whether she was somewhat to blame for her mother's discontent and felt guilty about her mother's leaving. She also discusses the void her mother's leaving left in her life, which caused her to experience grief and doubt about her own identity and position within the family. She internalizes the situation and admits, "I started to wonder if it was my fault that she left. Maybe if I had been better, or if I hadn't argued with her so much, she would have stayed. I didn't know what to think anymore" (49). She blames herself partially for her mother's departure from home. She reveals her deep-seated guilt and confusion. Passing through the majestic landscapes, she gradually gains maturity and attempts to realize the reality of life experiences.

Erikson's theory places a strong emphasis on the crucial stage Sal is in during the journey and it is that of developing her identity. It provides a safe haven for Sal to process her feelings and comprehend who she is in connection with her mother's memory and her sense of self. Nature aids Sal in getting through this phase. Sal can make sense of her history and present it through her journey through nature, which helps her transition from bewilderment to a stronger sense of self. The landscapes she encounters while travelling function as a means of recovery from the emotional chaos. She develops the maturity to analyse identity and role confusion. Thus, Sal turns to nature as a place to think about her identity and her goals.

Then nature bolsters her to identify her role to be performed to shape her life in the right direction. In *Walk Two Moons*, nature is a living force that influences Sal's experiences and feelings rather than merely being a beautiful setting. Buell's idea enables us to understand the critical role that Sal's relationships with nature play in her recovery. The environments she travels through actively

bring up memories, offer comfort, and aid in her grieving process. Her emotional journey requires the presence of nature since it acts as a catalyst for introspection and personal development. Nature performs the role of a signifier to reconcile Sal's emotional impulsiveness. As the sole child of his parents, Sal grew up on a farm in Bybanks, Kentucky. Sal was given the name Salamanca Tree Hiddle by her mother, who adores trees. Momma and Sal are very close; Sal feels happy when Momma does and sad when Momma does. Buell categorically presents the relationship between nature and human beings through the American Dream. His negotiations with the therapeutic and transformative aspects of nature in *Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* provide valuable insights to analyse the relationship between Sal and nature. Buell acknowledges, "Nature has long been reckoned a crucial ingredient of the American national ego" (33). He conveys that nature stands as an important component of American identity. To retain the American identity, nature remains a crucial factor in the American Indian tribe.

The changing landscapes reflect Sal's internal emotional journey and add to the process of healing as Buell writes, "A landscape of much richer personal and social memory, both mythic and secular, might have suggested itself" (257). It is possible that a far richer landscape of communal and personal memory—both mythic and secular—has emerged. Sal is getting ready to go on the road trip with her grandparents to see Momma. She hopes she can bring Momma home if they get to Lewiston by Momma's birthday, which gives them seven days to make the trip. Sal begins to pray trees. She feels easier than praying to god. She states, "I prayed to trees. This was easier than praying directly to God" (4). Gramps makes lots of stops along the way, at all the places where Momma stopped while she was on her trip. They wade into Lake Michigan, dance with Native Americans in Wisconsin, and skinny dip in the Missouri River. Sal encounters various natural objects on the way. She sees spiders, snakes and wasps that make her strong and fearless. The environmental imagination integrates with the soothing of emotions.

While moving ahead, Sal becomes nostalgic. She keeps herself in the experiences of her momma. She reveals, "I wanted to be back in Bybanks, Kentucky, in the hills and the trees, near the

cows and chickens and pigs, I wanted to run down the hill from the barn and through the kitchen door that banged behind me and see my mother and my father sitting at the table peeling apples” (10). She intends to be back in the hills and trees of Bybanks, Kentucky, surrounded by pigs, chickens, and cows. She wanted to run from the barn down the hill, past the kitchen door that crashed shut behind her, and desired to see her parents’ eating apple peeling at the table. She gains emotional strength, a feeling of self, and identity from these echoes of her hometown’s environmental landscapes and native animals/insects.

Sal inherits her mother’s nature-loving disposition. Sal elucidates, “My mother has always loved anything that normally grows or lives out of doors—anything—lizards, trees, cows, caterpillars, birds, flowers, grasshoppers, crickets, toads, dandelions and ant pigs” (22). She believes that anything that typically grows or lives outdoors, including lizards, trees, cows, caterpillars, birds, flowers, grasshoppers, crickets, toads, dandelions, and ant pigs, has always been a favourite of my mother’s. These natural objects romanticize her mother. Similarly, Sal also develops her emotional growth by talking like her mother. Sal ponders about blackberries and remembers picking blackberries with momma. According to Momma, people should only pick blackberries that were growing at people-height, the ones up high or down low were for the animals and birds. Sal’s mother, who had a deep love for nature, instilled this appreciation in Sal. As Sal travels across the country, she finds solace in the landscapes and natural surroundings that remind her of her mother. Sal’s relationship with nature nurtures her motherly feelings and aids in her grieving process.

The cross-country road trip serves as an emotional adventure that promotes healing and self-discovery. They had South Dakota, Wyoming, Montana, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Idaho on their itinerary. Sal is first not thrilled to see the South Dakota badlands and black hills, while Gramps is looking forward to viewing them. However, she feels delighted after viewing such sites. The whispers shift when Sal spots the first sign pointing toward the Black Hills. The Black Hills appear ominous and are covered in pine trees, not black as one might think. Passing through Wyoming, the trees and rivers whisper to Sal. She has a newfound sense of excitement. The sadness gives her some comfort.

Her love of the natural world is evident. She gives the trees a kiss. She believes that the landscape is stunning. Nature is, for Sal, something that makes her feel safe and comfortable. When Sal arrives at the site of the bus accident where her mother has died, she is forced to confront the harsh reality of her loss. This moment is pivotal in her journey, as it represents a turning point from denial to acceptance. Finally, Sal is fine. Everything is well. She accepts the death of her mother. She takes the matter naturally. She admits that her momma was actually dead. For Sal, nature serves as a trigger to embrace reality.

Throughout the journey, Sal reflects on her American heritage and her connection to the land, which provides her with a sense of identity and belonging. Buell explicates, “American Environmental thought is transformed into productive forms, towns and cities” (301). It suggests that American environmental philosophy is developed into useful forms in towns and cities. Sal’s association with nature becomes a source of comfort and strength. The nature replicates the emotional states of Sal in *Walk Two Moons*. Sal contends, “I should explain right off that my real name is Salamanca Tree Hiddle. Salamanca, my parents thought, was the name of Indian tribe to which my great-great grandmother belonged” (4). The nature is allied with the person’s identity in the American heritage. Her mother’s Native American name is ‘Chanhassen’ (9), which means ‘tree sweet juice’ (9). The Native Americans love nature and consider her as an integral part of human beings. Assimilation of nature and human beings stands as an important part of Native American heritage. They believe that trees have voices. They name the tree as a ‘singing tree’. In the absence of her father, Sal feels upset when the singing tree does not produce bird’s song. Further, Sal avers, “The trees were maples, and they were on fire-orange and red and yellow flames. I had never seen trees like that, and I couldn’t help it, I started to cry” (40). It echoes Sal's inner anguish and reverberates with her strong emotions.

Struggling to map her healing journeys, Sal primarily takes support from the natural environment and landscapes. Following the visit to her mother’s grave in Lewiston, she “knelt down and touched the grass. She smelled the dirt and the trees” (175) to say goodbye to her mother. She

accepts the death. She gains maturity and grounds in reality. At the end of the novel, she comes to a realization of life's undeniable reality. It marks a significant step in Sal's emotional healing. She recognizes that it is a part of a larger life that includes growth, love and other experiences. When Sal returns to her home in Bybanks, Kentucky, she finds comfort in the familiar landscape. She finds a sense of peace. She reveals, "I walk through the fields and the barn, and I take the long way back to the house. I think about the blackberries, and the swimming hole, and the singing tree, and the sugar maple. They are all still there, and they are all still mine" (184). It implies that Sal is able to appreciate the beauty and constancy of nature. She has acquired a sense of belonging and stability.

Growing emotionally resilient, Sal accepts her mother's departure and promises to move forward. She acknowledges, "I am happy for my mother, and for my father, and for my grandparents. And for me. And for Phoebe and her family. I am happy that we all had those people in our lives" (185). She has found a way to be grateful for the time she had with her mother and to appreciate the other important relationships in her life. These moments collectively show that Sal's healing journey is complete. She has processed her grief, accepted her mother's death and found peace within herself and her surroundings.

## **Conclusion**

Nature in the novel symbolizes growth, renewal, psychological healing and the passage of time for the young adults. The adults often encounter emotional turmoil, role confusion, identity crisis and conflict with the adults. Sal gradually accepts her mother's absence and learns to welcome life's changes as she travels through various places. The natural world mirrors her internal emotional journey, representing both the pain of loss and the potential for healing and new beginnings.

For Sal, nature is also a therapeutic escape. When she is overwhelmed by emotions or difficult memories, the beauty and tranquillity of the natural world provide her with a space to reflect and find peace. The act of being in nature allows her to step away from her troubles and gain perspective on her experiences. The journey through different landscapes parallels Sal's emotional journey. This

physical movement through diverse and sometimes challenging environments reflects the internal challenges she faces as she confronts her grief and begins to heal.

Overall, nature in *Walk Two Moons* is intricately tied to Sal's emotional healing. It represents a safe space where she can connect with her memories, find solace, and ultimately, begin to move forward with her life. Sal's journey in *Walk Two Moons* is one of emotional growth as she learns to cope with her grief, embrace her identity and find peace within herself. The novel beautifully intertwines the themes of loss, love, and the power of storytelling as a means of healing. By the end of the novel, Sal has gained a deeper understanding of her mother's struggles and her own emotional wounds. This allows her to forgive both her mother and herself, leading to emotional healing. Her interactions with the natural world –the landscapes and trees, rivers-contribute her to process her grief and finding peace. Thus, nature serves as a grounding force for Sal, providing her with the stability and comfort she needs to face her inner commotion. This analysis in this paper has paved the way for new lines of thought and research, encouraging more examination of the complex relationship between young adults and nature. It inspires Sal like young adults to engage in the conservation of nature for their own lives and posterity.

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## **The Role of Landscape in Depicting Environmental Impact and Trauma: A Comparative Study of Select Atomic Bomb Poetry and Fiction**

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**Abstract:** In atomic bomb literature, landscape plays a crucial role in depicting the environmental impact and reflecting the resulting psychological trauma. Although landscapes may seem like passive backdrops, they are nonetheless integral to portraying both human and geographical dimensions of trauma in these works. They evoke desolation, grief, alienation, horror, the uncanny, and existential dread, among many others. They portray the macabre through the depiction of corpses and human remains integrated into the setting, while horrified awe is inspired by the representation of the extensive physical destruction that instantly reshaped the entire cityscape. These terrains invert the giving, nurturing nature of land and water which are contaminated with radiation, the presence of broken objects, or dead bodies. Moreover, landscapes represent a loss in the aftermath of the atomic bombing in multiple ways—of precious objects, neighbourhoods, homes, nature, familiar sights, places associated with good memories, etc.

Hence, landscape representation has a multifaceted role in atomic bomb literature, giving glimpses into the dystopian vision of the atomic bomb's aftermath. The significance is clear in how they are used for both literal and metaphorical purposes in atomic bomb fiction, with terms like 'cremation ground', 'atomic wasteland', etc., conveying the severity of the destruction. The paper seeks to study the role of landscape in depicting environmental impact and related trauma in select poems of Yamaguchi Tsutomu and Tōge Sankichi; a short story "The Rite" by Hiroko Takenishi, and the novel *City of Corpses* by Yōko Ōta. Furthermore, the study explores how different genres utilize landscapes to convey the magnitude of atomic devastation.

**Keywords:** Atomic Bomb Literature, Hibakusha Testimonies, Landscape Representation, Human and Environmental Impact of Atomic Bombings



The bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki marked a turning point that plunged the world into a state of precariousness, inspiring a body of literature that documents both the environmental devastation and human trauma caused by the use of nuclear weapons. This sense of fragility, both physical and psychological, was laid bare by the nuclear devastation and is vividly depicted in the landscapes of atomic bomb literature. For the hibakusha (the atomic bomb survivors), this literature serves as a powerful testimonial to the specific destruction they witnessed, making it one of the earliest genres to directly address the impact of nuclear weapons. The genres of poetry, short stories, and novels attempt to express the different dimensions of unimaginable suffering they experienced.

In these works, landscapes hold both literal and symbolic significance, connecting different temporal dimensions. They evoke the world before the bombings—though that world may exist only in memories—while also representing the immediate aftermath and the future. For example, landscapes evoke the possibility of recurring devastation or, conversely, the potential for the land's revival after destruction.

In testimonial works, the landscape also represents two vital aspects of Japanese culture: nature and community. On both personal and collective levels, landscape representations are embedded with the survivor's psychic, spiritual, and physical trauma, serving as a visual testament to the extreme, apocalyptic destruction wrought by the bomb. As Richard Minear states in his introduction to *Hiroshima: Three Witnesses*, "Together, riverbeds and river-banks became the setting where the drama of life and, more often, death played itself out... Atomic holocaust may render all geography ultimately irrelevant; but it was Hiroshima the bomb obliterated on August 6, not a nameless, featureless spot on the map" (9). In contrast, the revival of places in the survivor's memory, or the regrowth of nature on the devastated land, offers a brief glimpse of hope, reconnecting survivors briefly to life and their collective place within society.

It is undeniable that landscape has a key role to play in the atomic bomb literature, but this role is shaped by expectations and constraints of different genres—poetry, short stories, or novels. Each form engages with environmental destruction and individual trauma in distinct ways, eliciting

different subjective responses. By comparing how each genre portrays the trauma, the role of literary forms in framing the experience and shaping the reader's understanding of the nuclear catastrophe becomes clear. The following analysis examines a few poetic works by Tōge Sankichi and Yamaguchi Tsutomu, followed by the short story "The Rite" and concludes with the novel *City of Corpses*.

In Tōge Sankichi's poem "Landscape with River," the landscape is marked by the arrival of winter marks the landscape. The poem initially describes a beautiful landscape with a timeless river, snow-clad mountains, and a city scene with its bridges and houses. Then, the narrator and his wife begin a conversation with the query, "Tonight...what will we wear to keep warm?" (343).

The hibakusha, having lost their homes and material wealth/ possessions, have been made vulnerable to the elements in addition to the radiation, which threatened their survival after the bombing. Thus, the beauty of the remaining landscape—untouched by the bomb—has become dangerous rather than comforting.

On this river bank, the narrator remarks to his wife, "we too/ are living grave markers," meaning that the survivors have become their own graves, like living monuments or markers that, with their existence, commemorate their own eventual deaths. The use of 'we' indicates that they share this fate with others as well. This observation by the narrator about their fate is grounded in the altered setting of the riverbank above the leveled city of "bleached bones", where flames rise on the surface of the waves.

In another poem called "Landscape," Tōge remarks how the landscape itself has become the permanent symbol of trauma that the victims carry everywhere with them. He says, "You and I carry with us a landscape always in flames" (355). This line is repeated in the poem with a slight change, shifting from the words "carry with us" to "live in a." This repetition emphasizes how the landscape in flames has become a new normal for the survivors. The flames here refer to the fires that continued to burn the city after the initial destruction brought about by the atomic bomb. The lines also indicate

a memory of the city landscape overwritten in the aftermath, where the past beauty and connection to the landscape are obliterated (for the hibakusha), leaving only the imprint of destruction.

The destroyed land also includes nature, whose portrayal in the atomic bomb literary works is inverted: instead of nature evoking beauty or peace, riverbanks and tree shades become disturbing. The water and land, once representing life, are now overwhelmed by death and macabre imagery.

In atomic bomb literature, the landscape is saturated with death and devastation, with rubble from fallen buildings, riverbanks, and other locations becoming places where people die en masse. These landscapes foreground the tragedy of the atomic bomb victims' deaths. In poetry, the landscape is often narrowed down to the specific places where the people die, highlighting the injustice of their death. For example, in Tōge Sankichi's poem "The Smile," the death scene is set in the stench of pus: "In the choking stench of pus, / stripped even of the capacity for hatred, for anger, / you sent the world of the living that last smile" (346). Here, the visceral decay of the body pervades the setting, emphasising the inescapable reality of suffering and powerlessness. Similarly, in "Dying" by Tōge, the setting of a roadside death emphasises the inhumanity of the death: "Why? / Why here/ by the side of the road/ cut off, dear, from you/ why/ must/I /die/ ?" (310). In these examples, the settings are sites of death, which reinforce the horror of the suffering. The disruption of familiar settings—whether through the presence of a human in pus (an element previously absent) or a roadside (ordinarily associated with life and movement)—brings discomfort to the reader and confronts the humanity in them.

The poetic form allows for the expression of the horrific landscape post-bombing more symbolically and artistically, often evoking a stronger emotional response through vivid imagery. For example, Yamaguchi Tsutomu refers to the landscape as an "atomic wasteland" in one tanka in his work *And the River Flowed as a Raft of Corpse*. The term wasteland carries a profound sense of loss and desolation from the survivors' perspective while also symbolizing the devastating impacts of nuclear weapons, obliteration of natural life, and environmental degradation. Yamaguchi's atomic wasteland differs starkly from T.S. Eliot's wasteland in his iconic poem *The Waste Land*. While

Eliot's wasteland is symbolic of spiritual decay and cultural fragmentation following World War I, Yamaguchi's is not merely symbolic but rooted in a physical, lived trauma, reflecting the tangible environmental and human impacts of nuclear devastation.

In another poem, the poet calls the land a "cremation ground," capturing how the entire city was turned into a graveyard where all living beings were indiscriminately killed. In yet another poem, Yamaguchi evokes the trauma of the explosion's heat and the subsequent fires which consumed the people and the land. He proclaims, "The ground will never dry / it is soaked with the fat of all the people/ who burned and died" (35). Metaphorically, the lines suggest that the trauma and suffering of the victims have seeped into the very land. They also imply that the transformation of the land is irreversible and that the agony of the dead can never be erased from the land in which they died. In these lines, the image of the ground, saturated with the remains of those who perished, challenges the idea that human memory fades over time, instead suggesting that the land itself silently bears witness to trauma and continues to hold traces of what has occurred on it.

In the short story "The Rite," landscape plays a more technically complex role in portraying the trauma and healing that emerges from the atomic bomb experience: supporting the narrative structure, reflecting character development (or the mental state of the protagonist Aki), and imbuing a philosophy of life in the aftermath through the depiction of nature.

After the bombing, Aki becomes obsessed with rites. The story begins with a description of the landscape outside her window, where she sees a dying man as his family brings him inside their riverside home with a tin roof on which several red peppers have been set out to dry. His family surround him, wailing and mourning as they attempt to save him. His death, witnessed in his house on a hill, contrasts sharply with the atomic bomb deaths Aki reflects on later in the story.

Her friends, whose lives and deaths remain unconfirmed even years later, had no graves or rites and, in a sense, no homes where they could safely pass on. For Aki, their memories are tied to the places she met them when she once met them—a pile of hay in a big tilled field where she used to lie with a friend, or the scenery from the night before the bombing when a friend visited: the croaking of frogs

near her home, and the veranda where they took turns rushing out every time, they heard a splash in the garden pond. Through similar landscapes in her present—like when she looks out of her rented room window into the river beach beyond the garden—she revives traces of those past moments, once free of death and trauma.

Nature, for one, reflects her and other survivors' struggle to live despite the odds. The protagonist, Aki describes how, in the shade of things, "little sprouting lives" make a secret gamble. She further narrates, "however secret the bet, however poor the chance, the thing that once begins to breathe alive will go on living in the dark of the night" (178). The phrase "dark of the night" mirrors her traumatic state, and through the description of nature, she ultimately explores her own and other hibakusha's struggles to survive and carry on despite the lasting physical and mental impacts.

The story's conclusion is crucial to its narrative structure and Aki's inner state. Her abandoned and hauntingly silent surroundings are again converted to a thriving one, indicating a step towards healing. However, the transition between both landscapes remains ambiguous—whether the silence is real or a product of her imagination is unclear. Later, she admits to fears of the tragedy repeating: "But there are times, nevertheless, when I am struck with the dread premonition that suddenly one day all those tall buildings will come tumbling down...All these familiar things about me every day...It seems to me I hear the sound of all these things crumbling down" (193-4). This lingering fear reveals her trauma, her inability to fully reconnect with life around her, and her continued entrapment in a world of death.

Aki's fear of the world crumbling once again reflects a projection of the past into the future, reinforcing the persistence of trauma in atomic bomb literature. This temporal collapse can be understood in two significant ways: as repetition compulsion, a symptom of trauma embedded in the narrative, and as a rhetorical strategy, subtly warning of a possible future destruction akin to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As Pramod Nayar notes in *Nuclear Cultures*, when nuclear fictions imagine the destruction of the world, it is "a political choice as an aesthetic because it rejects the necessity of

local realities—the specifics of cities, people, etc.—in favour of a figure of the human form or cities that could be destroyed” (150).

In Aki’s case, however, the setting does not erase specificity; instead, it is precisely through the landscapes she inhabits—both real and remembered—that her trauma manifests. Her surroundings reinforce her alienation, as she remains disconnected from the present, caught between a lost past and an uncertain future. The story’s shifting landscapes mirror her lingering despair and emotional detachment, revealing how trauma disrupts time, memory, and perception of the world itself.

The role of landscape in portraying these atrocities shifts with different genres. As demonstrated in the analysis above, the landscape description in the atomic bomb poetry is often fragmented, focusing on a particular disturbing visual—such as in Yamaguchi’s line, “the river flowed as a raft of corpses,” which serves as the title of his poetry collection. On the other hand, in the short story, the landscape (symbolically and thematically) weaves in the personal narrative arc of the journey of the character Aki.

In Yōko Ōta’s work, the landscape is represented through the cityscape, which she portrays holistically, narrating the condition of different parts of the city and detailing the destruction of various localities, bridges, and cultural landmarks. In the novel/ testimonial work *City of Corpses*, the chapter “Hiroshima, City of Doom” exemplifies this approach. Here, Ōta recalls the beauty of Hiroshima’s cityscape—its topography, rivers, bridges, nature, houses, and buildings—associating them with pride and fond memories before the bombing.

After describing what the city once was, she concludes the first part of the chapter with: “This was the city which, one morning at the height of summer, suddenly and without warning, there flashed an eerie blue flash” (180). However, the bombing’s devastation brings an overwhelming sense of grief as the narrator witnesses the destruction of the cityscape. At one point, she mentions how she eventually grows accustomed to the dead bodies but finds herself filled with grief and heartache upon

seeing Hiroshima Castle—once a key landmark —now "toppled to the earth and absolutely flattened" (226).

For Ōta, the castle was a crucial part of the cityscape, one that brought the city "flavour of the past" (226). Its destruction represents an immense loss of Hiroshima's tradition and history. She also describes hundreds of temples, once a "grand sight," like the "ancient buildings of the Hongan Temple" as "completely flattened" (227) without even the pieces of the roof visible.

The description of Hiroshima city, with its cultural, historical, social, and political dimensions, plays the role of highlighting its uniqueness and value in contrast to the dehumanization of the city's land and people through the impact of the bombing. Ōta's grief over the lost landmarks like the Hiroshima castle and the temples is not just about the physical obliteration of these buildings but about the severed connection they provided to the rest of the city. The landscape depictions offer a glimpse into her profound sense of loss and trauma over the erasure of personal and collective memory, identity, and cultural heritage tied to Hiroshima pre-bombing.

As the narrative reveals, the transformed landscape—filled with fires and burning, dying people, and numerous corpses—creates a geographical trauma for Ōta, which becomes an integral part of the atomic bomb trauma that haunts her. This stark transformation is reinforced throughout the work. For instance, a young woman describes seeing the moment of destruction from afar when "an indescribably strange smoke was billowing and then it got pitch dark" (222). Later, on a train journey to a safer place after the bombing, Ōta recounts the changed geography: "desolate fields where every last house had burned" (229) and "rows of collapsed houses" as far as the eye could see, creating a 'nightmarish' picture.

The narrative contrasts the transformation of the city with its past, when it was "pure and clean" in Ōta's words, only to be reduced to a place reeking of "rotting human flesh," rendered uninhabitable. This overwhelming transformation weighs heavily on her so that upon reaching a town untouched by the bomb, she feels on the verge of fainting at the sight of cherry trees—once a familiar presence in her hometown.

Ōta, to convey the scale of the destruction, also references parts of the city she didn't witness, such as reports of fire burning even on the surface of rivers and the severe destruction in the western areas, which suffered the greatest damage. In the novel *City of Corpses*, the landscape descriptions are more comprehensive and detailed compared to the other two genres. Yōko Ōta's work takes on an almost documentary approach, providing specific examples of destroyed landscapes to highlight the intensity of the bomb's impact. For example, the town of Yokogawa, with its small factory belt with many lumber mills, is depicted as having “scars to show that were ghastlier yet than the ashes of residential areas” (227). She describes flames that “belched and swirled in astonishing shapes” (227) from windows of the 'concrete' warehouses and factory buildings there. These vivid depictions give a sense of the vast scale and intensity of the destruction.

John Treat, in his work *Writing Ground Zero*, complicates how Ōta attempts to convey the scale of the atrocity (which influences the reader), he says Ōta mediates the scale, “through herself and in a sense to herself; the point of view which Ōta selected in *City of Corpses* insured that the map of Hiroshima she was to draw would be precisely the frantic route she took out of the city” (211). He argues that “burnt buildings, burnt people—an unrelieved range of inert carnage” (212) have only one “center of consciousness”—that of Ōta herself. This restricts the reader, limiting access to only what Ōta experienced, knew, and was able to convey. Moreover, the documentary manner in which she conveys the whole narrative, in John Treat's words, “renders us [the readers]... redundant and surplus” (212).

Nevertheless, the landscape foregrounds the extreme trauma and unimaginable suffering of the victims, shaping the representation of the helpless conditions in which the survivors found themselves. For example, Ōta describes a shrine where her sister lived, reduced to ruins with only a scorched giant tree remaining, the ongoing fire preventing her family from reaching her sister's place. In another incident, she describes a road that is blocked with “dead bodies,” or collapsed buildings, interwoven with the dead, creating a haunting scene of destruction.



But upon seeing the destroyed buildings and the dead in the surroundings near her home, but noticing pots and kettles and other non-living things intact, she feels “as [she] would feel on seeing, safe and sound, people [she] thought had died: how wonderful to clasp their hands in [hers]!” (220). This juxtaposition highlights the surreal nature of her experience; the survival of mundane objects amidst widespread human loss evokes in her a fleeting moment of hope and connection.

Additionally, nature, an integral part of the landscape, plays multiple roles in the novel—contrasting the horrific scene, offering moments of respite, or appearing in unnatural forms due to the atomic bombing. In one scene, Ōta describes a collapsed temple that pinned people under and killed three people from a family. As she and her family turn away, they walk towards the “strong rays of the afternoon sun” (224). Nature also provides brief relief; when Ōta and her family reach a more level area, they cook food from their remaining rations, and for the first time, she feels relief at her survival, sitting in the “hot sun and eating hot stew.”

However, nature also appears grotesquely altered. She describes, “tall trees ... now only the thick trunks remained. The branches and leaves were all dry as a bone, curled up tongue-like. The large ginkgo tree there ... was torn in two, in three; one part hung down toward the cemetery, one part hung down limply to the side, and the bark smouldered like charcoal that hasn't been fired long enough” (220). Even the temperature is described as “breathlessly hot,” reflecting unnatural climate conditions created by the bombing.

In conclusion, while the portrayal of landscape differs across various genres, these differences are artistic rather than fundamental. Since artistic quality cannot be the basis of criteria for judgment for testimonial literature like atomic bomb literature, the function of the representation takes precedence. The landscape representation plays its role in bringing fore reality from multiple angles, making what would otherwise be inaccessible and unimaginable more tangible.

Poetry, with its capacity for evoking multiple meanings, subtext, intense imagery, and symbolism, makes the role of landscape emotionally charged, often using it to convey the horrors of

nuclear warfare directly and provocatively. Its concise form also allows it to raise political questions about the morality of nuclear weapons in an unflinching, confrontational way, as seen in Tōge's work.

On the other hand, in the short story, the landscape reinforces the story's themes, offering a glimpse into the inner lives of the protagonist and allowing the reader to understand more deeply the personal story of Aki's survival. The novel, with its broader scope, can offer a more comprehensive exploration of the environmental impacts and human trauma caused by the atomic bombings. However, in the documentary nature of the work under consideration here, landscape descriptions function as factual records as well, which are interwoven with the subjective experiences of the author. Each genre, therefore, plays a crucial role in framing the nuclear catastrophe, using landscape not just as a backdrop but as an active force that reflects both individual and collective suffering, testifies to the scale of the devastation, and reveals the inescapable entanglement of human and environmental loss.

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## **Exploring Forests and Fantasies: Woods and Wilderness in Cli-Fi novel *The Swan Book***

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**Abstract:** The awareness of unforeseen and fast-escalating climate change has created climate fiction. Over the last ten years, issues related to climate change have erupted. It has been suggested in the past that climate fiction might help us deal with the unpredictable nature of climate change. Alexis Wright's novel *The Swan Book* is intricately woven into themes of life, death, and the complex relationships between humans and their environments. This paper explores the eco-critical dimensions of Wright's work within the context of indigenous studies, focusing on how she portrays the interconnectedness of ecological and cultural systems. Through examining narrative strategies, symbolism, and thematic elements, this research illuminates how Wright challenges conventional Western perspectives on ecology and foregrounds Indigenous knowledge systems.

**Keywords:** Ecology, Global warming, Aboriginal, Climate, Indigenous

### **Introduction**

Climate fiction is a type of literature that deals with environmental issues such as climate change, global warming, deforestation, etc. Climate change is a long-term concept in the average weather condition of a region and depicts that region's rainfall, temperature, etc. Climate fiction is a form of speculative fiction that features a changed or changing climate as a major plot device. Many writers have been writing climate fiction stories and novels for several years. A 2013 article from Scientific American (<https://www.scientificamerican.com>) credits journalist Dan Bloom with the crowning of the term cli-fi. In recent years, climate fiction has been achieving a lot of demand. Climate change is so horrible. It won't help anyone to only focus on the negative effects. It is good to be aware of the

urgency of the climate crisis. However, only seeing climate change as a threat can make us feel afraid and hopeless. We have to recreate the climate problem as a chance to create a better future. Bloom defines climate fiction simply as “novels are movies about climate change themes” (Thorpe 2021). Climate fiction intensifies the present and future risks of climate change in a way that reporting simply cannot match. Climate fiction teaches us not only about the world but also about the human soul. Researchers have shown that reading climate fiction changes readers' attitudes to climate change, at least for a time. Climate fiction is the study of the relationship between literature and climate or environment. Climate fiction is a literature that deals with climate change and global warming. University courses on literature and environmental issues may include climate change fiction in their syllabus. Readers of climate fiction are more concerned about climate change as compared to non-readers. They are concerned about the dangers of climate change and the adverse effects of nature.

Numerous cli-fi novels, short stories, and films have been produced as a result of the genre's growing popularity. Cli-fi is a genre that writers and filmmakers are utilizing to engage viewers in important discussions about global warming and environmental sustainability. Additionally, because environmental destruction and climate-related catastrophes are commonly interwoven into these plots, cli-fi has impacted other genres, including dystopian fiction and post-apocalyptic narratives. Knowing readers' fantasies about a future where there has been a shift in the climate in conjunction with climate fiction is crucial in the context of the growing popularity of climate fiction and the scientific interest in its effects (Trexler 185).

### **Early Influences**

The field of Indigenous studies has increasingly recognized the importance of ecological perspectives in understanding Indigenous cultures and identities. Scholars such as Kim Anderson (2016) and Deborah Bird Rose (2004) emphasize the inseparable connections between land, culture, and spirituality in Indigenous worldviews. Wright's *The Swan Book* contributes significantly to this discourse by portraying ecological relationships as integral to Indigenous survival and resilience. This research paper employs a close textual analysis of *The Swan Book*, focusing on key themes and

narrative techniques that highlight the ecologies of life and death. Drawing on ecocritical and Indigenous theoretical frameworks, the analysis explores how Wright challenges dominant Western environmental ideologies and reclaims Indigenous knowledge systems. By examining the representation of swans, landscapes, and climate change in the novel, this study aims to elucidate the complex ecological consciousness embedded in Wright's narrative.

### **Cli-fi and Eco-criticism**

Climate fiction talks bring up several issues that have sparked the more untamed branch of literary and social criticism known as 'Eco-criticism.' The significance of nature in literary culture from antiquity to the present, as well as in numerous linguistic traditions and genres, is assessed in this topic. Questions about the future depicted in the genre have also been sparked by discussions of sci-fi. Critics questioned if the genre always depicts the cataclysmic annihilation of the carbon-based living forms, such as humans or the entire planet. The key question for climate fiction is why and whether it is simpler to conceive the end of the world through climate-related flooding than it is to consider life after capitalism, building on a long-running discussion in science fiction studies. The critics are drawn to these perennially relevant themes and search the genre for instances in which it might appear to look beyond crises. In other words, the movement of ecocriticism implores readers to recognize cli-fi's explicit allegiance to utopian invention and its most immediately apparent dedication to catastrophic dread. Although these two gestures appear in varied ways in various climate change fiction works, they both frequently appear and are crucial elements of the genre.

While most climate fiction is speculative, it is supported by science. The events depicted in cli-fi novels could occur today or in the not-too-distant future. This kind of genre frequently depicts science-fictional or utopian futures based on how humanity reacts to the effects of climate change. The rapid speed of climate fiction is broken up by crises. In this kind of fiction, the feeling of dread and anxiety is evident. Dramatic changes are made to the cli-fi setting. In climate fiction, the focus is on the characters' emotional journeys. A depressing future for humanity is portrayed in the majority

of these stories, which encourages readers to address the elements influencing climate change that are driven by human activity.

### **Exploring Forests and Fantasies**

Alexis Wright, an acclaimed Indigenous Australian author, brings forth a powerful narrative in *The Swan Book* that delves deep into the intertwined ecologies of life and death. Through her protagonist, Oblivia, and the haunting presence of swans, Wright constructs a narrative that transcends mere storytelling, offering profound insights into Indigenous relationships with land, water, and non-human entities. This paper aims to analyse how Wright's novel enriches the discourse on ecologies in Indigenous studies, highlighting the significance of her ecological worldview and its implications for contemporary environmental thought. This paper synthesizes *The Swan Book* with critical perspectives from Indigenous studies and ecocriticism, exploring how the novel challenges conventional environmental and cultural narratives. It underscores the importance of Indigenous ecological knowledge and its potential to reshape contemporary discourses on sustainability and justice (Anderson 97). Similarly, the novel examines the nuanced interactions between people and nature. It explores the negative effects of utilizing and modifying ecosystems as well as the opportunity for restoration, reconnection, and peaceful coexistence with nature. This work emphasizes optimism, resilience, and the possibility of positive change despite the frequently grim situations described. Stories of adaptation, community development, and environmental stewardship are featured as they examine the transformational potential of both individual and group action. This idea can be best elaborated in the following way:

The sun departs, and the heat deceives

The darkness falls, and the colour leaves

As the son's in its final struggle to hold sway

With the purple gold rate and dark blue display... (Warren 61)

Wright's portrayal of swans as both symbolic and literal entities in *The Swan Book* underscores Indigenous perspectives on environmental stewardship and cultural continuity. The novel critiques

colonial exploitation of natural resources while affirming Indigenous practices of custodianship and reciprocity with the land. Furthermore, through Oblivia's journey and encounters with the spirits of the dead, Wright illustrates the interconnectedness of human existence with broader ecological systems, challenging anthropocentric views of nature prevalent in Western thought.

The novel *The Swan Book* is set in futuristic Australia and the world is in a terrible state because of sudden climate change. Oblivia is the central character of this novel. She is an Aboriginal girl who is saved by a woman called Bella Donna. Oblivia was abandoned by her family and community. She was gang-raped and faced many other atrocities.

Bella Donna is a refugee from Europe and a survivor of a disaster that affected and took thousands of lives. Both of them are Bella Donna and Oblivia towards a Swamp where Bella Donna tells Oblivia stories of white swans from Europe. On the contrary side, Oblivia grew up with black swans. As Oblivia grows up, Bella Donna dies. Oblivia gets abducted by an Aboriginal man called Warren. Warren became the first Aboriginal president of Australia. He clasps Oblivia to keep her in captivity. After the swans visit her in her confinement and sensing that they might be in danger, Oblivia finds the strength to escape. She killed her husband and decided to become a refugee and go North in search of the safety of the Black swans. It revolves around the theme of the loss of Indigenous traditions, loss of habitats, bad conditions of the detention camps, and the hardship of maintaining Aboriginal people's rights and freedom. The main idea behind writing this novel, Alexis Wright, mentioned in an interview that when she was working in central Australia in 2003, people were telling her about swans that they had seen in the desert, sometimes on very shallow stretches of water. Many of them were astonished to see them in these places, so far away from the coastal and wetter regions of Australia. Because of changes in weather patterns and adverse climate conditions, the swans had moved far away from their original habitats. The swans migrated for suitable climate conditions. Not only human beings but also non-human beings are also affected by this adverse climate condition. By taking inspiration from this thing, Alexis Wright decided to write a story for the Anthropocene. In this way, *The Swan Book* can be noticed as the first climate change novel.



## Impact of Climate

An increasing number of environmental challenges, chief among them climate change, have become urgent in the twenty-first century. Literature has taken on the duty of bringing attention to these urgent issues as temperatures globally rise, weather patterns grow more unpredictable, and the effects of degradation of the environment become more evident. It is set in a world that has been destroyed by climate change. Using a combination of storytelling techniques and critical analysis, this book seeks to show how *The Swan Book* functions as a grave environmental warning.

The world of *The Swan Book* is post-apocalyptic, with the effects of climate change being visibly felt. Large areas of the land have been inundated by rising sea levels, which has caused ecosystems to be destroyed and people to be displaced. Strong commentary on the catastrophic effects of environmental degradation is offered by the novel's vivid and captivating depictions of this dystopian planet. It draws attention to the devastation of ecosystems, the disappearance of species, and the unfortunate situation of those who are uprooted by the shifting terrain. The novel's depiction of population displacement due to rising sea levels is a direct representation of current issues. Coastal areas are becoming more vulnerable as the planet's polar ice caps melt and temperatures in the ocean increase. The suffering of the communities compelled to leave their ancestral lands because of this environmental disaster is brought to light in *The Swan Book*. The story highlights the terrible effects of such relocation on the ties that Indigenous tribes have to their ancestral lands on a cultural and spiritual level. The discussion section contextualizes Wright's narrative within broader debates on environmental justice and Indigenous sovereignty. By centring Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies, *The Swan Book* offers a counter-narrative to mainstream environmentalism, emphasizing holistic approaches to ecological sustainability rooted in cultural traditions. Moreover, the novel prompts readers to reconsider the implications of climate change and environmental degradation through an indigenous lens, urging solidarity and collective action.

The acute drought in the nation is connected to Oblivia's rape and her subsequent fall into the gut of a eucalyptus tree in the first chapter, "Dust Cycle,"; one's trauma affects the other as -

Some say that there was an accident before the drought. A little girl was lost. She had fallen into the deep underground bowl of a giant eucalyptus tree. In a silent world, the girl slept for a very long time among the tree's huge woven roots. Everyone had forgotten that she even existed—although that did not take long (Wright 16).

The majority of the concepts and imagery centre on the land's vitality and significance, which are connected to our continent's prehistoric past, *The Swan Book*. Similar to her previous two books, *The Swan Book* begins on the plains of the Gulf of Carpentaria, Wright's traditional Waanyi country. However, due to climate change and the Australian army's incursion into Aboriginal communities as a result of the 'Intervention' verdict, this land has been nearly completely transformed. *The Swan Book* parodies Western society in general while also focusing on the politics underlying the intervention. The nation and its species have undergone such a drastic transformation as a result of the West's rapacious exploration of the entire globe, its trespassing upon it, and its exploitation of its resources in the quest for cheap labour, that they no longer have any ancestral legends associated with particular landforms and locales. New narratives are required as an outcome of climate change since landscapes inevitably change and disappear.

Narratives about biota that depict the natural world as a living entity with agency, interconnected with human existence, rather than merely a breathtaking backdrop for human dramas, are called Country. One of these imaginative stories is *The Swan Book*. The opening scene is told in the first person by the broken child girl Oblivion Ethyl(ene), also referred to as Oblivia at times. Wright's explanation of the interplay between people, non-human animals, the land, and the stories that makeup the country is at its most intricate yet in this instalment: Oblivia's head is the novel's universe as well as her ancestral country; the country tells the story via Oblivia. The eutrophication of the swamp is due to both the brutal imposition of the Intervention and human-caused climate change, which has caused the weather systems of the continent to flip, resulting in an infestation of dust in the tropical north.

In *The Swan Book*, Alison Ravenscroft picked up on a theme that Wright's two earlier books did not address, and I think this is what makes the book fundamentally different: "If Carpentaria is a potent story about hope that never dies, *The Swan Book* surely puts the longevity of hope into doubt, seriously at risk" (Ravenscroft 194).

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Alexis Wright's *The Swan Book* emerges as a seminal work in Indigenous literature that reimagines ecologies of life and death through a uniquely Indigenous perspective. By foregrounding the interconnectedness of human, non-human, and spiritual realms, Wright challenges readers to confront their ethical responsibilities toward the environment and Indigenous communities.

In this way, such type of work helps to promote environmental awareness and engagement. Climate fiction is essential for increasing understanding of and participation in dialogues about climate change among audiences. Climate fiction addresses readers and viewers who might not be familiar with scientific studies or scholarly conversation on the subject by incorporating environmental themes into storytelling. People can better understand the urgency and scope of the environmental crisis thanks to the medium it provides for communication and education. Readers of climate fiction may be motivated to research scientific knowledge, learn more about climate change, and take part in environmental debates.

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## Urban Identity and Rural Investigations: Urbanisation in the Selected Works of Agatha Christie's *Miss Marple* Series

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the portrayal of rural landscapes in Agatha Christie's *Miss Marple* series, published between the year 1930 to 1976, highlighting the subtle yet significant transformations in rural England during these years. By employing Henri Lefebvre's theory of space, the study delves into the aesthetic and identity shifts in these rural settings, contrasting pre-war and post-war periods. The *Miss Marple* narratives serve as a lens to observe the nuanced changes within the rural community, shedding light on how these transformations reflect broader socio-economic trends. The paper aims to explore the causes behind these evolving landscapes and their impact on the rural populace, focusing on factors such as industrialization, urban migration, and shifts in social structures. Additionally, my paper plans to juxtapose these findings with the contemporary fragmentation of urban space in India, drawing parallels between the rural-urban divide in mid-20th century England and present-day urban fragmentation in India. This comparative analysis will generate a deeper understanding of how space and identity are interwoven, transcending the time-space barrier to provide valuable insights into the ongoing dynamics of rural and urban aesthetics. Through this exploration, the paper will contribute to the broader discourse on landscape change and community identity in literature and spatial theory. The term "landscape" indicates a multifaceted concept that is important across various fields of study but is especially central to geography. The *Dictionary of Human Geography*(2009) defines it as cardinal term of human geography that serves as a central object of investigation (Gregory et al.409).While the physical qualities of an area can be termed as the "natural landscape" (Sauer 325), man expressing his place in nature as a distinct agent of modification leads to the formation of cultural landscape (Sauer 333).Urban landscape is, therefore in terms of human geography, a derivation of cultural landscape that come to dominate the modern era.

**Keywords:** Urbanisation, Rural landscape, Community identity, Migration, Spatial Transformation, Gentrification

This paper examines the portrayal of rural landscapes in Agatha Christie's *Miss Marple* series, published between the year 1930 to 1976, highlighting the subtle yet significant transformations in rural England during these years. By employing Henri Lefebvre's theory of space, the study delves into the aesthetic and identity shifts in these rural settings, contrasting pre-war and post-war periods. The *Miss Marple* narratives serve as a lens to observe the nuanced changes within the rural community, shedding light on how these transformations reflect broader socio-economic trends. The paper aims to explore the causes behind these evolving landscapes and their impact on the rural populace, focusing on factors such as industrialization, urban migration, and shifts in social structures. Additionally, my paper plans to juxtapose these findings with the contemporary fragmentation of urban space in India, drawing parallels between the rural-urban divide in mid-20th century England and present-day urban fragmentation in India. This comparative analysis will generate a deeper understanding of how space and identity are interwoven, transcending the time-space barrier to provide valuable insights into the ongoing dynamics of rural and urban aesthetics. Through this exploration, the paper will contribute to the broader discourse on landscape change and community identity in literature and spatial theory. The term "landscape" indicates a multifaceted concept important across various fields of study but is especially central to geography. The *Dictionary of Human Geography* (2009) defines it as cardinal term of human geography that serves as a central object of investigation (Gregory et al. 409). While the physical qualities of an area can be termed as the "natural landscape" (Sauer 325), man expressing his place in nature as a distinct agent of modification leads to the formation of a cultural landscape (Sauer 333). Urban landscape is, therefore in terms of human geography, a derivation of the cultural landscape that came to dominate the modern era.

The term “urbanisation” is commonly associated with “the experience and expectation of human demographic change” (Gregory et al. 792). Hence the modern era with its teeming billions necessitates the conversion of the natural landscape into a habitable place capable of supporting the growing population. A second lens to identify the process of urbanisation includes economic transformation which traditionally excludes the primary activities of agriculture, forestry, fishing or mining. Consequently, society changes due to size, density, heterogeneity with a greater likelihood of lacking familiarity with one another (Castree et al. 542). These changes in the economic, social and cultural transformation along with the physical transformation of the land into built-up areas, all contribute to the creation of urban space.

In this paper I would like to explore how this phenomenon can be observed in the stories of Miss Marple, written by Agatha Christie and published between the years 1930 to 1976. The stories will argue were most likely driven by the post-war changes in the economic, social and political scenario such as the decolonisation of South and South-east Asia, decentralization of the economy, decline of agriculture and rising population. In other words, they provide a map charting the shifting political climate of the time and can be used to study how changes on a global political scale impacted the everyday life of rural England. As changes occurred in the rural landscape due to urbanisation, the effect was simultaneously felt in the community, leading to a change in the sense of ‘place’. There is a distinct change in the atmosphere of the stories as they proceed to the post-war period into a more modernised world. There is a sense of loss of community and a sense of nostalgia. I would like to argue further that this is not just unique to England but can be noticed in Indian society as well, undergoing the process of urbanisation. The underlying reasons and period may differ, but the reaction it evokes from the people inhabiting that space remains unchanged.

Edmund Crispin in his conversation on Christie with H.R.F Keating says, “When one thinks of her, one thinks inevitably of English country life.... in particular of small villages and parsonages” (Keating 33). Like many inter-war mystery novelists, Christie was fond of the village landscape as

the setting for her detective novels. She drew on her personal experiences to create them, claiming accuracy by stating, “there are several villages remarkably [a]like” (Snell, 24). A closed community, microcosmic in nature, is reflected in the stories of *Miss Marple* by Christie. Published from 1930–1971, they exhibit idyllic country life where the effect of murder is heightened by moral shock and a sense of unexpectedness. One would expect such a village landscape to remain constant or as Raymond West, Miss Marple’s nephew, puts it, a “stagnant pool” (Christie *Vicarage* 353). Yet a close study of the stories reveals changes that are occurring in the background bringing about transformation both subtle and glaring in the village landscape.

Stories like *Murder at the Vicarage* (1930) or *Body in the Library* (1942) written during the inter-war period, exhibit a strong “rural” background. A rural landscape is dominated by primary activities such as agriculture and with a more dispersed population pattern (Castree et al. 444). It is relatively homogenous in nature, resulting in a close-knit community where “nothing ever happens” (Christie *Sleeping Murder* 25). Instances of the closeness of the community is understood when Mr. Clement, the vicar tells the artist Lawrence Redding that everyone in village probably knows what kind of toothpowder he uses (Christie *Vicarage* 25) or the fact that the news of murdered girl found in Colonel Bantry's library spreads throughout the village with surprising accuracy but with obvious embellishment even before the police comes to the scene in the story *A Body in the Library*. The closeness of the community is also expressed through the detailed house-by-house mapping which creates a spatial grid of conventional and recognizable layout where social interaction and community dynamics can be expressed in a familiar manner (Snell 26). Thus, both the narrators, Mr. Clement in *Murder at the Vicarage* and Jerry Burton in *The Moving Finger* (1943) are very scrupulous in their description of the villages they inhabit. Convening at the Vicarage for tea to discuss village problems and issues is a recurrent motif in these early novels highlighting a space where religious and social aspects combine to again create a sense of strong community. The Vicar in these narratives often acts as the village community's ethical and moral authority. Thus, we see in *Murder at the Vicarage* and *Body in the Library* Miss Hartnells, Miss Price Ridley all swarm to Mr. Clement the Vicar with their



owes and complains while in *The Moving finger* and as well as *Murder at the Vicarage* the Vicarage itself serves as a space of consultation and elucidation of the crime.

These devices generate a sense of “rurality”, of a space characterized by aspects of “local knowledge” which is the “the tacit and explicit knowledge possessed and used by people who share the same culture, acquired from sustained proximity” (Castree et al. 290). Hence there is this all-pervasive feeling amongst the reader that everybody knows everybody, which is highlighted in later books like *A Murder is Announced* (1950) where Miss Marple comments to Inspector Craddock as:

Fifteen years ago one knew who everybody was. The Bantrys in the big house-and the Hartnells and the Price Ridleys and the Weatherbys... They were people whose fathers and mothers and grandfathers and grandmothers, or whose aunts and uncles, had lived there before them. (Christie *Announced* 154)

This very local knowledge is challenged if not completely but to a certain extent, in the post-World War II novels. The turmoil of the War and its after-effects on Britain’s economic and political landscape could not be ignored. Decolonisation of Britain’s overseas empire triggered migration of the “repatriates”, that is, white settlers who left colonies to return to their “homeland” (Elridge et al. 156). One such instance can be found in *Murder is Announced*, where Miss Marple says:

Every village and small country place is full of people who've just come and settled there without any ties to bring them. The big houses have been sold, and the cottages have been converted and changed. And people just come - and all you know about them is what they say about themselves. They've come, you see, from all over the world. People from India and Hong Kong and China... (Christie *Announced* 154)

Suppose there is an underlying tone of discontent. In that case, it is perhaps the reflection of the fact that “returnee-citizens faced discrimination from resident-citizens in subtle (and sometimes less subtle) ways” (Elridge et al. 156). The once close-knit community with familiar faces now has

elements of the unknown. “Alison Light commented on Christie's obsession with unstable identities, the ultimate unknowability of others' which can be said is the outcome of these changes taking place. It is this sense of a safe, known world thrown out of kilter... These characters grapple with their relationships and connections to others suggesting they are not part of a consciously defined community” (Snell 47). This lack of awareness of their belonging creates a sense of disharmony in the social fabric. Thus, we see Philipa Haymes, in *A Murder is Announced*, and Bryan Eastley, in *4.50 from Paddington* (1957), struggling to find their place in the community and, as a result, creating friction in both society and within the family sphere. Whereas Philipa is a possible suspect in the attempted murder of Miss Blacklock, Bryan struggles to settle down into a fulfilling family life with his son. As Lucy Eyelsbarrow observes:

She had gone on and grown up into a post-war world - but she felt as though Bryan had not gone on but had been passed by in the passage of years. His next words confirmed this. He had subsided onto the kitchen table again. “It's a difficult sort of world,” he said, “isn't it? To get your bearings in, I mean”. (Christie 4.50 72)

Her observation reflects the general sentiment of these displaced individuals towards the post-war society and it can be well imagined the outlook of the community towards such uprooted people.

The migration of the repatriates and their subsequent process of inclusion into the community isn't the only reason for the changing rural landscape that can be detected. British population had grown rapidly from 48,841,000 in 1951 to 53,078,000 in 1971, and several planning decisions were taken to cope with the situation (Clout 21). This led to rural areas around important urban centres starting to experience “dramatic growth in the form of continuously built-up suburbia and more dispersed commuting settlements” (Clout 20), ushering in the process of urbanisation. As Lefebvre puts it:

The urban fabric grows, extends its borders, corrodes the residue of agrarian life. This expression, “urban fabric,” does not narrowly define the built world of cities but all manifestations of the dominance of the city over the country. (Lefebvre 3-4)

The reason for this dominance of the city over the country was manifold. Beginning from the inter-war period, the price of farmlands had gradually been declining, which was capitalised by the government during the post-war period, where regional development schemes promoted the conversion of farmhouses and land to meet the housing needs of the “new middle class”. The new middle class here, possibly referred to as the working class, who are delineated from the cultured professional middle class (Savage 55). Other reasons for the growing population in the countryside can be attributed to:

continuing dispersion of suburbia (urbanisation) further into environmentally attractive countryside;

a trend for certain forms of industrial activities and service employment to undergo decentralisation from large cities to medium-sized towns, market towns and even smaller settlements.

counter urbanisation, whereby people make a fairly clear break with urban/suburban lifestyles to settle in remote rural districts;

retirement migration, which takes late middle-aged and elderly people to coastal and - increasingly - to rural locations where cheaper, more appropriate housing is to be found in attractive environments. (Clout 25)

The reasons which have been stated above are observed because of a city’s coping mechanism to accommodate its growing population. As the city proper struggles with space, various attributes of the city, especially that of housing, are dispersed to its surrounding area. With developed lines of communication in form of roads and railways and increase in private car ownership, the remote nature of the rural area is obliterated, and it is initiated into the urban fabric. This example can be observed

in *4.50 from Paddington*, where the Crackenthorpe's land has already been surrounded by the town (Christie *Paddington* 34) or in *Mirror Crack'd from Side to Side* (1962), where we get a glimpse of the changes in St. Mary Mead through Miss Marple's reminiscences where she delves over each changed and unchanged aspect of the village. Though there are those characteristics which have unchanged characteristics like "houses themselves were little changed in appearances" (Christie *Crack'd* 4), the essence of the village, with "a glittering new supermarket - anathema to the elderly ladies of St Mary Mead", is lost as Miss Marple declares "St Mary Mead was not the place it had been" (Christie *Crack'd* 4 - 5). Perhaps the biggest indication of the changing rural landscape and a reflection of the promotion of the conversion of the farmhouses and land to housing estate is when Miss Marple mentions the "The Development", which was in the area where Farmer Giles's fields once were (Christie *Crack'd* 5). "The Development" housing estate as is understood as the story proceeds is necessary and was part of the 'Planning' (Christie *Crack'd* 7).

The expansion of the "urban fabric" (Lefebvre 3-4) is evident through physical transformations in the rural landscape, such as increased built-up areas and rural gentrification ensues the transformation of the rural community. "Rural gentrification" is defined as the process by which the rural landscape is transformed and improved through the reinvestment of capital, leading to the displacement of local residents by incoming, higher-income groups (Castree et al. 443). The fragmentation of the rural community emerges as the "urban phenomenon" (Lefebvre 46) becomes more pronounced, so much so that any region untouched by it is either stagnant or dying (Lefebvre 4). The primary characteristic of the "urban phenomenon" is defined by its enormity and complexities (Lefebvre 46). Society ceases to be homogenous, and several heterogeneous elements arise, ranging from economic to social. Whether it is diversification of the employment sector (farmers are now confronted by agricultural towns (Lefebvre 4)) or deviation from the traditional class structure, social relations no longer remain unequivocal. These may include relations of production, exchange and market relations both visible and invisible (Lefebvre 46). Thus, where the "a glittering new

supermarket” in St Mary Mead presents the visible change in market relation, the more invisible changes in the market relation are exhibited when Miss Hartnell exclaims:

Packets of things one's never even heard of... All these great packets of breakfast cereal instead of cooking a child a proper breakfast of bacon and eggs. And you're expected to take a basket yourself and go round looking for things – it takes a quarter of an hour sometimes to find all one wants - and usually made up in inconvenient sizes, too much or too little. And then a long queue waiting to pay as you go out. Most tiring. (Christie *Crack'd* 5).

Such changing market relations also impact the social space where before, shopping was more of a social activity, “So obliging, comfortable chairs to sit in by the counter, and cosy discussions as to cuts of bacon, and varieties of cheese” (Christie *Crack'd* 5) to a more economic exchange of goods and services.

The incursion of outsiders, due to gentrification (The Development (Christie *Crack'd* 7)) into the tight-knit rural community of St Mary Mead in the post-war novels of *Miss Marple* leads to a sense of alienation with its landscape when compared to the previous books. Description of the village is no longer provided in detail beyond a certain area. If there is a general sense of annoyance towards the ‘people of the Development’, the sentiment could be incited because, unlike return migrants who were still to a certain extent welcomed into the rural community due to their past familial connection, the new migrants have no family connections, and their rising numbers could lead the local residents to feel like minority in their own home area (Clout 27). The Vicarage has stopped being the center of activity which denotes the fact that influence of the church was declining, and the concept of Parish was all but gone. Even the home was not free from changes as there was a decline in the domestic service sector with the unavailability of a maid being a recurring theme. Thus, we see in *4.50 from Paddington* this bleak situation of the domestic situation is capitalized by Lucy Eyelsbarrow who starts her own specialized domestic service while in *Mirror Crack'd from Side to Side* Miss Marple reflects on the changing nature of maids who in past had skills, rather than education and compare

them to her present maid Cherry who though 'an intelligent girl, took telephone calls correctly' lacked the skills 'to wash up, and how to make a bed' (Christie *Crack'd* 8).

Many of the effects of urbanisation as seen in rural Britain post-war is noticed in India though much later, during the post liberalisation era. The Indian economy opened up in 1991 and its impact hardly noticeable in the first decade, has since then emerged as the driving force behind changing urban landscape (Shaw 27). In this process, significant changes in land use are taking place, noticeably altering the appearance and atmosphere of certain areas within the cities. The cities encroached on their surrounding area leading to faster rate of growth of suburbs and peripheral areas much of which was a result of considerable decentralization very much alike post-war Britain (Shaw 28-29). The process of liberalization led to a change in market relations where smaller and more local shops lost their importance to much by larger departmental stores. Within this lies the economic conflict of formal and informal, local and global showcasing the struggle over space and the multi-layered nature of the issues involved (Shaw 75).

Another aspect of similarity which is noticed between post-war Britain and post liberalisation is the rise of the new middle class. Leela Fernandes, in her book *India's New Middle Class* (2006) comments that "the rise of the new Indian middle class represents the political construction of a social group that operates as a proponent of economic liberalization." (Leela xviii). This middle class is not "new" in the sense of having a different structural or social foundation. In other words, its "newness" does not imply that it consists of previously lower-income individuals moving up into the middle class. Instead, the term "new" refers to the creation of a distinct social and political identity that stakes a claim to the advantages brought about by economic liberalisation. The emergence of this identity is linked to the socio-economic transformations driven by liberalisation policies, which have created opportunities for economic and cultural capital accumulation, reinforcing their privileged position in the evolving social hierarchy (Leela xviii).

In conclusion, this paper has explored the shifting dynamics of rural and urban landscapes as depicted in Agatha Christie's *Miss Marple* series, illustrating how these narratives serve as historical maps of socio-economic and cultural transformation. Through the lens of Henri Lefebvre's spatial theory, Christie's portrayal of rural England from the inter-war period to the post-war era reveals the profound impact of urbanisation, migration, and changing market relations on traditional community structures. The comparative analysis with contemporary urban fragmentation in India underscores the universal nature of these spatial transitions, reinforcing the notion that rural and urban identities are in constant negotiation.

More than mere backdrops to crime fiction, Christie's villages reflect the anxieties of modernization—nostalgia for a vanishing world and apprehension toward an unfamiliar future. The disruption of long-standing social ties and the erosion of localized knowledge challenge our understanding of “place” and belonging. As today's cities and rural areas continue to evolve, often in ways that mirror the patterns observed in Christie's England, the question remains: how do communities reconcile the preservation of identity with the inevitability of change? This inquiry not only extends the relevance of Christie's work but also invites reflection on our own spatial and cultural landscapes in the face of ongoing urban expansion and social transformation.

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## **Pleasure Domes and Caves of Steel: The Future of Urban Space in the Works of Isaac Asimov**

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**Abstract:** Speculative science fiction often serves as a cautionary tale regarding the latent potential of the earth's ecological ruin, environmental degradation and technological overreach. As Isaac Asimov writes, "It is an odd form of escape literature that worried its readers with atom bombs, overpopulation, bacterial warfare, trips to the moon and other phenomenon decades before the rest of the world had to take up the problem" ("Escape" 332). Asimov contemplates the future of urban space as "warrens of humanity" (Foundation 62) as congestion, overpopulation and other environmental factors lead humanity to self-incarcerate in enclosed underground cities. Meanwhile, another fraction suffers from mysophobia, which limits the possibility of and even the desire for human contact. These heterotopias are populated by various forms of the posthuman, a society of bio-medically diverse human race with different antibodies, different resistances to germs and a very different history from the one we know. The new urban space with "endless corridors burrowed under the continental shelves and the oceans were turned into huge underground aqua-cultural cisterns" (Foundation 62) is under scrutiny in our paper, which examines these imagined urban conglomerates where the amalgam of space and its inhabitants forms a hyperreal macrocosm that may be studied through the dual lens of posthumanism and postmodernism.

**Keywords:** Posthumanism, Postmodernism, Urban Space, Science Fiction, Isaac Asimov

### **Introduction: The Speculative and the Concrete**

The Earth asks us to change as everything changes and evolves, like the flesh-tearing Allosaurus who became a warbler singing from the treetops when the time for flesh-tearing was over. For if we don't change, we will, like all that does not change, perish.

(Kimmerer 22)

Spaces transform with the presence of their human and non-human inhabitants. During the Renaissance, artists and architects created buildings, sculptures, and paintings that emphasised geometric shapes and harmonious symmetry. They believed that the beauty of the spaces they crafted reflected the inner peace and beauty to which they aspired (Pearson 4). Over the decades, as urban areas have evolved, these meticulously planned spaces gave way to the dense conglomeration of structures intricately woven together by a network of roads crisscrossing like veins, connecting every part in a complex, almost neural, pattern. Urban space is a heterogeneous assemblage of the organic and the inorganic, where labyrinthine streets and skyscrapers form the backdrop against which billions of interconnected individual stories constantly unfold. It is in a constant flux, reflecting life's tumultuous nature and the chaotic psychology of its denizens. In light of this, the paper deals with the science fiction stories of Isaac Asimov, particularly those that shed light on his speculations regarding the organic and inorganic future of humanity and urban space. Asimov's urban development ideas challenge the regimented demarcations between utopia and dystopia and pave the way to an open forum upon which these potentialities can be evaluated. Asimov's fiction falls within a long tradition of science fiction writers who posit ideas and theories regarding how the urban space would one day change with the people inhabiting it.

In his 1952 science fiction novel *City*, Clifford D. Simak presents the story of urban transformation through a series of loosely related short stories, all located in a metropolis that changes over thousands of narrative years. The book envisions a future where the fundamental realities of life have so radically changed that the future listeners of the past stories might be prompted to ask whether such a thing as 'human' ever really walked on two legs and inhabited the city:

They will ask: "What is Man?"

Or perhaps: "What is a city?"

Or: "What is war?"

There is no positive answer to any of these questions. (Simak 1)

Speculative fiction, as Slaughter puts it, gives us “an entire grammar of future possibility” (Slaughter 30). By venturing beyond the bounds of possibility, they offer ideas that transcend reason or empirical truths, opening up creative avenues for envisioning future innovations and sustainable living. In the words of Natalie Collie, such fiction “can be a powerful means of making highly abstract, difficult, idealistic, terrifying, or difficult ideas and situations possible to imagine and be meaningful” (Collie 426). These, therefore, provide a lens through which decades of evolution can be viewed with the hope that humanity can actively and collectively work towards a better future. The spaces within science fiction that depict the urban population and its habitations are, as Vivian Sobchack puts it, “hypnagogic site(s)” (78). In other words, these are sites of liminality existing between that which is real and that which is imagined, “where the anxieties, desires, fetishes of a culture’s waking world and dream world converge and are resolved into a substantial and systematic architecture” (Sobchack 78). This liminality is made possible owing to the fact that the anxieties, desires and fetishes surrounding the city constantly haunt the minds of its denizens and reverberate in the subconscious well past one’s waking hours. These “cities of imagination” (Sobchack 78) resonate with Edward Soja’s concept of the “urban imaginary”, which constitutes “our mental or cognitive mappings of urban reality” (324). This constitutes the ways in which we perceive urban reality, the means we employ to make sense of it, how we discover a sense of identity through the community and the roles we enact within these spaces.

While Sobchack’s study deals mainly with the depiction of urban space in science fiction films, particularly the way these cinematic depictions of a speculative future intend to provide “a sunnier imagination of an inhospitable space” (86) capturing the city’s “incoherence” in a “scripted order” and circumscribing the “dizzying boundlessness” and heterogeneity of the city within the constraints of a “hermetic frame” (86). One may argue that neither the inhospitality nor the sunnier aspect of the city is ever strictly contained. The implication of these speculative urban spaces extends beyond the hermetic frame of the scene or even the edges of the printed text. These constitute the psyche of the modern urban self. These spaces are a response to the problems of contemporary

urbanity, depicting either a utopian impulse towards an ideal or a dystopic exaggeration of some deep-rooted issues. These stories deepen our understanding of the spaces we inhabit and enrich the ways in which we navigate and negotiate with them. Thus, stories, specifically science fiction stories like the one discussed in this paper, play a vital role in shaping our perception of reality by framing our understanding and equipping us with the linguistic and conceptual tools necessary to engage with the past, present, and future. This idea will be further explored in the rest of the paper through a critical analysis of Asimov's stories, examining how his narratives reflect and influence our collective understanding of human potential and societal evolution.

### **Posthuman and the Posturban**

Isaac Asimov is an author who consistently explores future cityscapes with startling optimism:

For instance, I wrote a novel in 1953 which pictured a world in which everyone lived in underground cities, comfortably enclosed away from the open air. People would say, “How could you imagine such a nightmarish situation?” And I would answer in astonishment, “What nightmarish situation?” (Asimov, *Nightfall* 124)

Asimov's claustrophilia spawned a series of speculative future living conditions of the posthuman. These spaces are created for comfort and functionality but, above all, out of necessity as the earth we inhabit fails to support the growing population with its finite resources. While it has been argued that the city and the individual evolve together, Asimov, I argue explores this evolution in a unique light. In his books, individuals and cities are parallel sites of simultaneous development. Each evolves in its own right. Humans take to the skies and colonise distant planets in search of sustainability and resources. These colonisers lived in sparsely populated planets that were urbanised with the use of technology and became what Asimov referred to as “Spacers.” Having grown up beyond the confines of Earth's microbial ecosystem, these posthuman individuals have undergone biomedical evolution, resulting in the loss of the antibodies that once defined their ancestors' immune systems.

Having weaker immune systems has rendered the Spacers of Arora and Solaria mysophobes who live in isolation in sequestered spaces and do not feel the need to interact socially. Meanwhile,

cities on Earth have evolved into a “hundred-thousand-unit Section” connected by expressways that contain a “vast continuous trickle of humanity” (Asimov, *Caves* 17-18). These entombed hyper-functional cities, “imprisoning caves” (Asimov, *Caves* 134), contained “infinite lights: the luminous walls and ceilings that seemed to drip cool, even phosphorescence...” are also hyperreal versions of ‘primitive cities ’which Asimov dismisses as “just huddles and dwellings large and small, open to the air” (Asimov, *Caves* 22). Having burrowed underground to accommodate the overpopulation, humanity now has socially ingrained agoraphobia and is unable to conceive life outside the steel domes it has built for itself. Thus, the familiar becomes uncanny and hostile, while the artificiality of the fluorescent lights and advertisements provide a sense of comfort. “Outside was the wilderness, the open sky that few could face with anything like equanimity” (Asimov, *Caves* 24). These “outside” spaces are still necessary as they are rich in coal, eternally growing yeast, water, wood and other raw materials needed by man. These heterotopias were completely run by robots, with humans supervising them from a distance. Spacers have an inherent trust in these robots and make use of them extensively to make their lives easier. On the other hand, humans distrust these robots and employ them mostly for labour in mines outside the dome. Further, there exists in the Spacers an ingrained curiosity about the future; while they perfected gerontological research to ensure that they had longevity, they also conducted extensive research in the fictional study of psychohistory, allowing them not only to predict the future accurately but also participate in it.

Between the Earth dwellers and the Spacers, there lies a grudging awareness of a shared ancestry, but little else connects them. While Earth deals with the problem of overpopulation, the spacer cities deal with underpopulation. Due to this, the Spacers have a life expectancy of more than three hundred years and selectively euthanise children who are born with any birth defects (Asimov, *Caves* 136). This systematic practice of selective breeding and Eugenics shocks and unsettles Elijah Baley, an earthman detective who frequently voices the anxieties and concerns of the readers. The Spacers, too, seem apprehensive of the perfect balance and harmony that they have created through

artificial means. Perhaps they are aware that such balance is unnatural and not sustainable. As Han Fastolfe, the creator of the humanoid Daneel, puts it,

Changelessness is decay.

A paradox. There is no decay without a change for the worse.

Changelessness is a change for the worse. (Asimov, *Empire* 12)

The denizens of Solaria have taken the practice of Eugenics to an absurd degree. The residents inhabit urban centres that can hold millions of people, and yet, the residents of Solaria are only twenty thousand in number, living a life of loneliness and isolation and practicing regimented birth control. They are caught between the desire for human contact and interaction and the social conditioning that proximity is “unnatural.” While the city is a semiautonomous unit with individuals forming an ersatz community that collaborates for sustained living, the urban space in Solaria comprises decadent individual estates housing one or maybe two Solarians each. Baley’s trip to Solaria makes him realise the cultural differences between Earth dwellers and Solarians as he conducts a murder investigation. The wife of the deceased exists in a prelapsarian state of innocence as she feels no sense of shame at appearing in front of Elijah Baley in the nude during her hologram “viewing.”

“Viewing” through holographic images for Solarians was not the same as meeting someone. A distinction that they had demarcated between the ‘image ’and the ‘real ’seems incongruous to a future society when bio-medicine and technological advancements have enabled one to endlessly replicate most things. In the age of mechanical reproduction of the ‘image,’ humanity has created endless copies of itself, whether in the form of spacers or humanoid robots that mimic humanity. Interestingly, one thing that remains unreplicated is the essence of interpersonal interactions and human company. Ironically, the subject of physical intimacy and children seemed to make her uncomfortable, and her replies became indignant and self-righteous:

He said, “Well, you saw one another often?”

“What? I should hope not. We’re not animals, you know. . . We viewed each other whenever necessary.”

...

“Do you have any children?”

Gladia jumped to her feet in obvious agitation. “That’s too much. Of all the indecent -”

(Asimov, *Naked* 65)

It is clear here that Solaria functions as what Foucault called a heterotopia; it has its own set of rules, including ‘viewings’ extensive use of robots for every household task and practicing extreme seclusion even among married couples. These customs set them apart from Earth dwellers even if they lie within the same plane of existence. As a space that is distinct and ‘other,’ Solaria has its own culturally appropriate code of conduct, which is as alien to Elijah as the rules of Earth are to Gladia.

“Well, I’ve read a lot about Earth. I’ve always been interested you know. It’s such a queer world.” She gasped and added immediately, “I didn’t mean that.”

Baley frowned a little, “Any world is queer to people who don’t live on it.” (Asimov, *Naked* 68)

Gladia is curious about the queer nature of Earth, and it dawns on Baley that for her, he is the ‘Other,’ with unfathomable culture and practices to which she cannot relate. In another book of the same series, Gladia casts aside her initial reluctance to be blunt and is much more direct about how the ‘Other’ is perceived by her and the other spacers. “You were not - forgive me - altogether a man. You were a creature of Earth. You were human in appearance, but you were short-lived and infection-prone, something semihuman at best” (Asimov, *Dawn* 131). Humans on Earth and Solaria have thus evolved in two distinctly different ways. This has bifurcated the idea of what it means to be human. This led to a bio-political contention between the two factions as each lay claim to the contested title of “human,” “more human,” or even “semihuman,” Asimov himself doubted that overpopulation would ever accommodate human dignity, but his science fiction depictions of Earth dwellers suggest a more nuanced and complex take on the issue.

With the introduction of identity-altering biotechnology, bioethics has, over the last century or so, struggled to accommodate the changing definitions of what constitutes a human being.

Humanity has been reduced to what Derrida would refer to as a complex code (Qtd. in Wolfe 15) that can be deconstructed and reconstructed to alter what are essentially human paradigms, i.e., transience, ageing and disease.

Gladia's ignorance and subconscious biases, as well as Baley's response, underline the broader theme of Asimov's writing, which is that the unknown and the uncanny are the result of our limited perspectives. Asimov dismantles the bifurcated notion of evolution, making a case for a heterogeneous humanity across different spaces. The world is diverse, and our understanding of humanity is as limited as our understanding of the universe:

That totality of human lives—past and present and to come—forms a tapestry that has been in existence now for many tens of thousands of years and has been growing more elaborate and, on the whole, more beautiful in all that time. Even the Spacers are an offshoot of the tapestry and they, too, add to the elaborateness and beauty of the pattern. (Asimov, *Empire* 228-229)

Elijah Baley can reconcile the inconsequential nature of his existence with the longevity and resilience of the human species. Perhaps without the same bio-medical and gerontological innovations that enable the Spacers to live for hundreds of years, Baley is blessed with the perspective that is unique to his temporality and impending mortality. We do not know what the future holds and what alterations and modifications are yet possible both for the urban space and for the human/posthuman body. Debra B. Shaw points out that technology and urban architecture must evolve in tandem with bio-medical advancements to accommodate the needs of the posthuman:

Accepted divisions of gender, race, class, sexuality and, more specifically, species emerge as arbitrary and open to challenge. Beyond this, the posthuman idea violates the sanctity of the institutions which have traditionally served the human ideal and have been largely responsible for its perpetuation. The isolated domesticity of the modern family and its association with private property, inherited wealth and sanctioned reproduction, already under threat, begins



to look distinctly alien to beings no longer invested in policing biological boundaries. (Shaw 9)

As the posthuman becomes a reality, it is the job of the modern-day architect to respond to changing conditions of life. Ontological change in the idea of 'human' and 'body' should, in other words, correspond with ontological changes in the concepts of inhabitation (Shaw 1). What, then, are the ethical implications of the changes to the human form that we witness in science fiction? Along a similar vein, one might also ask about the implication of the ever-changing and ever-evolving essence of the City, which Edward Soja calls a "pseudo-biological organism" (qtd. in Judd 5).

### **The City as a Unifying Agent at the Apex of its Functionality**

The city not only evolves as all biological organisms do, but it also contains sites of deformity and disease. The city is an anthropomorphic entity that breathes, lives and dies like any of its denizens. "Most of all there was the noise that was inseparable from life: the sound of millions talking, laughing, coughing, calling, humming, breathing" (Asimov, *Caves* 11). This city is a response to the biggest quandaries that threaten urban development. Asimov dreamt of a future where technology works relentlessly to cope with the population's increasing demands. He conjectured, not incorrectly, that by the year 2010 (far into his future), "We'll be having to grow twice the food out of soil that is being poisoned at seven times the rate" (Asimov, *Isaac* 165). Asimov, therefore, was by no means blind to the faults of humanity that had overextended the generosity of the planet on which they were both. He knew them to be "nasty, materialistic and aggressive people, careless of the rights of others, imperfectly democratic at home though quick to see the minor slaveries of others, and greedy without end" (Asimov, *Triangle* 54). Despite this, he forwarded a more hopeful vision of the future firmly planted in the idea of settlements and community.

Urban spaces, for Asimov and man's quest for new and sustainable urban areas, whether it was in dome-like structures, underground, or colonies set up on distant planets, would act as a unifying agent:

the clear necessity of expanding humanity's horizons would cause ... space settlements to be built. The construction would also serve as a great project that not only would be clearly of great benefit, but might induce human cooperation in something large enough to fire the heart and mind, and make people forget the petty quarrels that have engaged them for thousands of years in wars over insignificant scraps of earthly territory. (Asimov, *Exploring* 153)

Faced with the threat of extinction, Asimov believed would stir in humanity the spark of camaraderie necessary to set up future empires. These empires would take the form of future cities, which would be characterised by, at worst, adequacy, and at best, luxury, opulence and abundance. For Asimov, the City symbolized “the culmination of man’s mastery over the environment” (Asimov, *Caves* 25) more than any technological and scientific innovation that came before it. This was perhaps owing to the symbiotic relationship that these spaces created with their inhabitants. They provided all that man could ask for, “but it made demands of its inhabitants” (Asimov, *Caves* 33). Without cooperation and structure within society, the edifices that contained them would also crumble.

Thus, whether it was the biomedically advanced Spacers or the infection-ridden Earth dwellers, it's more important to be human and to have a human heritage . . . It is delightful to have the human heritage exist in a thousand varieties, for it makes for greater interest, but as soon as one variety is thought to be more important than another, the groundwork is laid for destroying them all. (Asimov, *In Joy* 147)

A sense of begrudging kinship is set up between different individuals who co-habit the face of city spaces since it is only with cooperation and intimacy that the human race can advance. Elija Baley, over the course of the Robot Series, succeeds in changing the overarching sense of difference between the Earth people and the Spacers into an attitude of tolerance. In the beginning, he is given a case that forces him to work with the Spacers against his own wishes, but in the later books, he continues to be assigned to such cases because he has developed a good relationship with them. In *Robots of Dawn*, Baley attempts to overcome the fear of space that humanity has inherited through generations

of confined living. And in *Robots and Empire*, we are told that humans have managed to conquer this fear.

This becomes an important lesson in light of modern-day isolationist tendencies. With most human needs delivered to their doorsteps by the use of the internet and telephonic applications, man's need to interact has diminished. Lives grow increasingly more isolated as we alienate ourselves from the community that is bound together by primitive village or tribe cultures. The growth of agoraphobic tendencies can be seen in the post-COVID-19 world as we readjust to a world where all social interactions are increasingly becoming optional. Asimov both predicted and feared this reclusive tendency, "Without the interplay of human against human, the chief interest in life is gone; most of the intellectual values are gone; most of the reason for living is gone" (Asimov, *Naked* 398). The city depends on this interplay for its optimum functionality, thereby creating a space for it and necessitating it. It creates spaces of conservation within which, though individuals age and die, the essence of human life and dignity remains preserved.

## **Conclusion**

Asimov's speculative fiction offers an exploration of the future of urban spaces and human evolution. His narratives envision a world where humanity and its habitats undergo parallel transformations, each influencing and reflecting the other. Asimov's cities, whether enclosed underground or sprawling across distant planets, are more than mere backdrops—they are active agents in shaping human identity and societal structures. By blurring the boundaries between utopia and dystopia, Asimov invites readers to critically engage with the possibilities and challenges that lie ahead. His stories underscore the importance of cooperation, adaptability, and a shared sense of humanity in navigating the complex, ever-evolving urban landscapes of the future.

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## ***The Housekeeper and the Lady in The Haunting of Bly Manor (2020): Relationship between Place, Memory, and Ghostly Haunting***

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**Abstract:** The present paper tries to comparatively analyse two characters—the housekeeper, Hannah Grose, and the Lady of the Lake, Viola Llyod—from *The Haunting of Bly Manor (2020)* to understand the relationship between memory and the ghostly haunting of a geo-topographical space. The assumption about the experience of death is that the dead can, despite bodily immobility, replay and relive and remember their choicest memories in their final moments.

‘Ghost’ as a topological monster is a paradox because it defers the finality of death to overstay in the world of the living, while simultaneously being placeless for bodily death or physical death ends all material and worldly connections. Haunting by a ghost is diegetically presented as a reliving of memories in a state of suspension between bodily death and the unknown finality of death. Through the two characters, this paper will analyse the ways in which memory serves to create and maintain a sense of identity and self in life, and how a rupture in this connection is seen as death, both figuratively and literally.

The paper refers to the two episodes, namely ‘The Altar of the Dead ’and ‘The Beast in the Jungle’ to understand the memory-hopping, entrapment or “tucking away” in a memory, and the telescoping and microscoping of time and space by the characters as a way to safe-keep their identity as a living human, while simultaneously these happening at all signal their death and their suspension in the human world as ghostly figures.

**Keywords:** Monstrosity, Place, Space, Memory, Lake, Bly Manor

### **Introduction**

Topographical study of the mind and memory <sup>1</sup> discusses how events as experienced and stored as memory are placed in a form of a mental landscape which makes them available according to its

variously accessible terrain. Their studies discuss ways in which storage and retrieval of memories occur in the memory corpus, which in itself is seen as a location. Studying the mental or psychological scene or area of the imagination reveals how events are recalled especially seen in their narrative order and the emphasis is put on the parts considered more relevant or personal or not. They also discuss memory as a space wherein the individual can come in, travel through, and leave using aided methods like hypnosis and psychoanalysis. On the other hand, studies of spaces (Schlosser 2017, Rosário and Álvarez 2021, Tally Jr. 2021) consider the ways in which they serve as locations of memory units. They are not merely places or sites where characters act out their parts but are also part of the revisitation which constitutes their memory. For individuals as well as groups, spaces form an intricate part of identity, for example, of indigeneity and tribal identity. On the other hand is the idea of diaspora or migration of groups thriving without a space to call 'home' who form their identity by way of crises, (re)formulations and (re)negotiations.

In parallel, in cinema, especially in the supernatural horror genre, death and the presence of monsters make spaces uncanny. In horror narratives which include monsters as characters along with monstrous human characters, the topological relation of the monster to the setting becomes intrinsic to the characterisation of the same. The idea of a topographical relation of horror narratives to their locational settings has been borrowed from what Crane et al. discuss in the case of thrillers, which, according to them:

can be set anywhere: in crowded cities; in suburban houses; in remote rural locations; on planes, trains, buses and spacecraft; in dense jungles, or in sparsely populated deserts; on land or on the high seas. ... But this flexibility does not suggest that setting is irrelevant to plot—quite the opposite. Within the thriller genre, different settings enable and constrain certain kinds of stories. (220)

Instances of death and the presence of otherworldly creatures are often used tropes in horror narratives to build up the established codes for horror. The most popular instance is of the ghost that refuses to leave a place which it has claimed as its own and thereby keeps haunting it for years, decades, or

centuries on end without giving respite to whoever occupies the space after them. Their haunting often turns deadly and murderous when the envy of the ghost for the material world surpasses the bounds of mere placation and turns into perverse occupation and ejection of its human residents. As a process signified by the occupation of the body as a residence of the soul becoming a post-death eviction of the soul from the physicality and corporeality of the human body, death marks the transition that turns the same soul into an immaterial presence and continuation as a ghost figure. The conversion of the soul into a ghost and into a monster, the final boss' to be 'defeated by the 'protagonist' (who is usually a human survivor of the monster's evils), is a popular trope for horror narratives.

The other common trope is when a locational setting, by way of its being an obvious presence within the human world serving as an animated place of activities and memory-making, turns into a graveyard of the same memories and thereby turns into a haunted space for evil to occur and reside in lieu of inhabitation by humans. Spaces desolate of human habitation and with close and/ or frequent contact with the dead are ideal for horror narratives. Peter Johnson studies both cemeteries and gardens as heterotopia. Of both spaces, he writes that "the space itself is presented as extraordinary, a 'world set apart' from the everyday, 'another world'" (3). In identifying the purpose of a cemetery as "a space for emplacing the placeless" (4), Johnson creates a connection with the locational idealness of such spaces as horror narrative settings.

In another strain, it is important to identify the idealness of spaces in becoming harbouring spaces for unrecoverable memories—both tangible and intangible. These well-frequented spaces are home to memories preserved over time with concerted efforts like commemorative buildings and sites, museums, and libraries, which are reserves of a past to be read as history while it is kept as immediate as the present. Hallam and Hockey (2001) note, "[j]ust as the spatialising of memory and death allows human mortality to be apprehended and given meaning, so the temporal reach of material spaces transcends the here and now, connecting with future lives and deaths" (84).

Spaces, therefore, can be read as major memory-constructing machinations and also provide ways in which the memory can serve to create and maintain a sense of identity and self in life. The present paper extrapolates the above idea that a rupture in this connection is what gets narrativized as death, both figuratively and literally, of the identity and of the self that is contained by the physical body. The narrative analysed for this purpose is the Netflix web drama series titled *The Haunting of Bly Manor* (2020) directed by Mike Flanagan.

### ***The Haunting of Bly Manor* (2020): An Overview**

*The Haunting*, called by reviewer <sup>2</sup> as a “gothic romance” (but self-reflexively called “a love story” by one of the characters in its last episode), has been tagged under horror. Abidingly, it can be specified as a locational horror wherein the titular manor is the location of the events described as ‘hauntings’ and plays a character that forwards the action. In the series, two characters—the ghostly monster or the Lady of the Lake, Viola Llyod, and the housekeeper of the house, Hannah Grose—are used as the textual figures under analysis. The paper deals with episodes five and eight, which are mainly concerned with these two characters. The series works out the idea of the Manor as haunted while presenting a story of its vengeful ghost known only as the ‘Lady of the Lake’ to its occupants. The Lady, who was owner of the Manor sometime in the seventeenth century, was Viola Lloyd. The backstory of Viola, as being adamantly attached not just to the house but also to her daughter and the trunk of clothes, gives her ghostly presence in the mansion and the narrative a human dimensionality.

In the eighth episode, ‘The Beast in the Jungle’, many pointers explain Lady Viola’s ghostliness and haunting, like her facelessness as she traverses the Manor over centuries; the haunting becoming a telescoping of memories as the finality of death for the Lady keeps being stubbornly deferred; and most importantly, the microscoping of time and space in the physical space of the Manor and the mental space of the characters.

The other character, Hannah Grose is the resident housekeeper of the Manor who had been employed by the immediately precedent owner of the Manor, the Wingrave couple. The intermittent presence and absence of Hannah in between conversations makes an interesting mystery which is



given a separate episode for an explanation and conclusion. Her presence and visibility to Dani and the children is an interesting take on how the interconnectedness of identity continues to inform the relationship between the dead and the living.

In the fifth episode, 'The Altar of the Dead' the housekeeper, Hannah Grose, is shown reliving her favourite memory repeatedly, being sent from one memory to another unexpectedly and in a disrupted manner. Her memory-hopping gets her closer to the realisation of her death while also being the marker of the fact that her soul is trapped in the Bly Manor. The death of Hannah is an interestingly sequenced subplot, with the use of cinematic elements of flashbacks, repetitive scenes, (con)fusion of memories, and her moving in and out of memories as if with the end of each byte of memory<sup>3</sup>.

### **Identity, Memory, Ghosts**

There are multiple cinematic tropes used in the rendition of the ghostly monster(s) that haunt(s) the grounds of the Manor—the haunted house, the ghosts existing in invisible parallel world(s) that intersects with the world of the living, the coming and going in through memories which turns the past and the present into one long haunting memory, and primarily, the previous lady of the titular house who turns into the ghostly monster that was the main reason for other ghosts to be present at all. The series postulates that if memories continue being recounted in the minds of people, then the 'human' persists to be. The reason why the present occupants of the Manor keep interacting with Hannah as a human and not a ghost might be because of the continuation of the memories which 'keep alive' a fellow occupant.

Additionally, the landscape of the Manor is intricately tied to the memories and lives it stores as a space, and itself, it is tied as a place stored in the fading memories of the characters, both ghostly and living. To this end, ghostly haunting is not a mere persistence of a disgruntled ghost in the human world disrupting the daily actions of the people coming in its path. Instead, it is a continuation of the desire to protect, which arises out of care and attachment in the material world wherein such concerns matter. The haunting by Viola is an example of this desire. The maternal care which Viola has for her

daughter makes her designate the little girl, Isabelle, as the sole and rightful inheritor of her title and wealth and also makes her protect the girl's future with all might and fury. Her wait for her daughter was a part of her desire to see her grow up and inherit the legacy so that her purpose to care was fulfilled and she could move on to a peaceful afterlife. The failure of this happens due to her husband's fear of her attachment to the family and the house as a curse, which makes her wait period turn monstrously long.

The theme of haunting takes over from this point, where it stops being a wait for the expected to happen and the waiting period to end. Rather, it turns to become a refusal to accept the not-happening of the expected, a refusal to accept that what was expected often does not come to pass and the concomitant lack of preparation for such a situation which thwarts expectations. The forever wait for some respite in the endlessness of time is reflected in the visages of the ghosts, who in their wait, have forgotten who they were waiting for and who they themselves were before their wait began. The only thing that they knew about themselves was that they were waiting for something. Their facelessness reflects a loss of memories which constituted their human identity and gave purpose to their wait in the first place.

The repetitive experience of memories, in which the characters find themselves looped, reveals the associations which people form and revert to and why they choose them of all others. The memories in which the characters are trapped are the ones which direct and guide their entire purpose in life and continue doing so in death. It moulds their identities and personalities in their daily interactions and interpersonal relationships. The memories for Viola are of her being alone, waiting for her daughter to come to her during her long sickness. For Hannah, her memory with Owens on his first visit to the Manor for his interview was her fondest that she keeps returning to it, not wanting to open other doors or pay attention to other sounds which take her away from the spatial-temporal dimension of that memory.

Hannah's intrusion into the memory shared only by Peter and Rebecca is an instance when the narrative reveals a blurring of boundaries between the individual memories and identities of the

other residents of the Manor—of past and present. It is in this moment where the memories turn porous, and they seem to be merging into one grand memory of the manor itself. The Manor, in subsuming the bodies and souls of the previous occupants of its space, allows them to grow into itself as a part of itself, which Owens at the beginning of the series refers to as ‘one big gravity well ... [where] it’s easy to get stuck in ...’, revealing an inability to leave the Manor. While Owens actually calls the entire Bly town as a gravity well, Henry in his first meeting with Dani calls it, as Flora would also call it later, ‘a great good place’ and ‘perfectly splendid.’ It is reflected aptly in the episode’s opening conversation between Owens and Hannah—that interestingly repeats itself thrice in the recollections of Hannah throughout the episode—where they talk about dementia and forgetting and death as echoing each other.

The Manor allows itself to be the last place for its occupants in life as in death, permitting the dead to be more mobile and freer on its grounds than in cemeteries and graves with their coffins. The Manor becomes a comfortable burial ground for its residents with a homely sense of its familiarity, but by turning the home into a grave, it reveals its unhomeliness. Further, as is seen in the spooky phone calls that the Manor residents get, there is Henry’s desire to have the affection of Flora, who was biologically his child from Charlotte. The entire narrative in its persistence and stubborn continuation—which conventional definitions call ‘haunting’—lies care as its driving force. The care manifests in a suffocating obsession, which makes the characters perpetrators as much as victims of it. The safe place turns unsafe and oppressive to the point of being unwelcoming and inhospitable altogether for the very same people for whom it was meant to be safe. This transition is makes it a horror story instead of a love story.

The analogy of the last moments of life and then death with a dream sequence is also of important mention. This analogy begins with the likeness of dreams to films.<sup>4</sup> The argument is that in waking life, we do not experience jumps from one place or time to another; instead, we have to pass through all the intermediate times and places. Whereas, in films, there can be a jump in any dimension, which can be together or separately, and it is experienced all altogether; or while

remaining in the same space there can be a jump forward or backward in time; or while remaining in the same time there can be a jump across different spaces. The time-space jumps which Hannah and others experience in the form of being tucked away in memories are the cinematic experiences of life's moments in an analogical relation to dreaming. But it can also be a cinematic replay of life for dying people as in cases of near-death experiences. In this construction in terms of a cinematic process, the monstrous evil comes as alive and immediate to the audience as a dream sequence, and as palpable and threatening as in out-of-body perspective<sup>5</sup> in literature on psychiatry and religion. The series therefore is cinematically self-reflexive and monstrous in its presentation.

An important mention to be made here is of the stress by the distinguished writer H. P. Lovecraft on scientific "realism" in fiction (Joshi 177), and of the area of spectral geography that notes parallels between magical geography in fiction and, noted by David Matless, "the academic discipline of geography, and of popular and policy geographical discourse" (336). In studying ghostly narratives, there is a "law ... of interaction of other worlds with ours" (Matless 341). In *The Haunting*, the Moonflower or the Queen of the Night flower that blossoms only for one night year is used as a scientific realist trope for the Anthropocene history of the characters in contrast to the temporality of planetary time portrayed by the ghost's trope.

The 'Queen' of the Manor's nights is the Lady of the Lake and the Manor that in a spacetime trope for the Manor extends to become a trope for the vast spacetime of planetary nature and the planet's ecological spacetime. Following Rakshit and Gaur's ecogothic study of Amitav Ghosh's works, in *The Haunting* too "[c]onnecting the uncanny, improbable experiences to the everyday lives of people is historically plausible, culturally inclusive, and literarily urgent" (3) to study "the repressed cultural past of peripheries [and] the commodification of human and extra-human nature" (3) as represented by the human characters and the ghosts of the Manor.

### **Ghostly Haunting and Spatial Boundedness of Ghosts**

In the series, there is no particularly identifiable case of a monster figure other than the ghostly occupants of the Manor. The dimension in which they continue their residence in the Manor is

invisible to the other occupants but there are moments of overlap and merging and blurring of the boundaries which separate the world of the living from that of the dead. The minor ghosts of the people who lived in the previous centuries remain voicelessly and unassumingly in the house, almost acquiescing to the more powerful figure of Lady Viola who even in death remains the Lady of the Lake. As such, the naming of the evil as presented by the minor ghosts remains as infrequent as their presence, and sometimes it is left out altogether.

Instead of a nameless attribution of some fearful threat, the reference to the power of Lady Viola is acknowledged in her naming as the Lady of the Lake. The obeisance to her ladyship over the Manor is not questioned or resisted even by the present owner and heirs, the Wingrave family. The continuation of her title from the Lady of the Manor to the Lady of the Lake, remains even after her death in a proper case of ghostly clinginess, as reflected in discussions of the narration as a projection of the diabolical by the governess<sup>6</sup>. In this representation of temporality and social significance in terms of the Anthropocene, there is a contrast executed with the Manor's significance as planetary time (Chakrabarty). The schedule of the Lady's rise and wanderings through the Manor make the residents schedule themselves accordingly in a fear of disturbing it. Dani's fearlessness in defying the restrictions on her own wanderings thereby emerge as disturbances to the larger spacetime design in a representative anthropological nature of intrusion.

Further, extrapolated from Bloomfield and Vurdubakis (2014), the articulating and rhetorical rehearsing of the philosophical anomalies and moral conflicts through science, and mediating it using technology, are also effective in social organisation. The status of being the Lady of the Manor and its continuation in the afterlife for Viola is pertinent and contiguous to her identity even post mortem. The association of naming with the construction of identity as discussed by Jane Pilcher (2016) also implicates and complicates the nameless bodies and body-less names, as embodied names and named bodies placed in their contextual social positionalities; thus, bringing into play the politics of contextualising the "body-subjects" by "making the body visible ... and by making visible also the connections between naming and the embodiment of identity" (776).

The term ‘Lady of the Lake’ refers to Viola’s wandering ghost makes a classed and gendered nuance of her position in terms of the contemporariness of the other occupants and the cultural distance of the target audience obvious and significant. Viola’s desire to possess and own—in times when women were not financially successful or even accepted as direct owners—makes her very conscious about her possessions. The very nature of being alive is included in the idea of possessing. Ghosts can be read as ‘material’ beings as their continuation on earth is due to a yearning to keep possessing worldly things even in the afterlife and not let go of their possessions of the material world behind. Their localisation in a space as a supernatural monstrosity is also based in their being not able to leave behind that which they want to keep claiming as their own even beyond death.

The designation is also important as she continues to let the place thrive on its own and does not make it uninhabitable for the occupants. Her worldly status as a feudal lady extends into her afterlife which is made possible by the grounds of Bly Manor. Her haunting of the Manor as a kind of nightly errand in search of her daughter and as a confirmation of her ownership of the place is opposed to the mere adamant refusal of ghosts in general to leave the place which they get attached to. Furthermore, the afterlife of the other dead spirits haunting the grounds is not due to their personal refusal to leave, but instead due to an entrapment by the superior and intensely forceful magnetism of the ghostly Lady.

In an argument scene between Peter and Rebecca, Peter claims that possessing the bodies of the Wingrave children alone can assure them of a life together as the house itself will only pull them away from each other into their memories. This doomed magnetism of the house has been narrativized as not a postmortem attribute gained or developed by Viola due to her life circumstances, rather it was carried into her ghostly after-life directly from her human personality when she refused to submit to the dictates of life and death, and the shrouded angel of death gave up all visits to the Bly Manor altogether, leaving not just Viola to her fate but also the other people who died there.

Caused first by Peter and then attempted by Dani, Viola’s and by extension the Manor’s planetary and ecogeographical spacetime gets disturbed that only resumes after their deaths as

sacrifices to pacify the anger of the ‘hungry monster’ which by extrapolation are ecological and climatic changes. Through the sacrificial death of Dani, the natural ecological temporal order is restored and an angelic calm takes the place of the monstrous anger.

### **Haunted Spaces and Loss of Identity**

In the series, there is a conspicuous overlap in terms of the attachments the characters have for the house and how they re-live the recurring memories. This re-living makes the characters haunted while they themselves haunt the grounds with their disrupted/ing presence—of being and/or not being and of discontinued presence. Through the narrative of a ghostly haunting, a link can be found between the aspects of place, time, identity, and memory. The characters Viola and Hannah, in their prolonged experience of the moment of death, feed on the memories gained in life. In this prolonging of memories revisited lies the nature of their haunting.

With both Viola and Hannah, their death floods their minds with the ‘memories’ where they are ‘tucked in.’ Hannah in her revisits is more frequently recalls her memories of the Bly Manor and Owens. On comparing Hannah’s death—which is a month-old incident considering that it happened on the day the au pair arrived in the house—to the death of Viola—which happened in the seventeenth century, the memories of the former are fresher to the dying and therefore easily recallable. But her loss of the same memories, the repetition of the one she most liked, and the jumbled sequence in which she re-lives them make her state more apparent.

Viola’s only memory has been her memory of the promise that her daughter would open the casket which carries her possessions. The strength of this sole memory keeps her tethered to the world and by the time of Dani’s arrival, even if blurred and misted, it turns her into the dreaded ghost of the Manor—one that pulls away people to their deaths in the lake and the same which Dani uses to save Flora from the fate. Viola’s memory becomes the planetary memory of ecological order and design, which is the only memory that needs preservation and pursuit to fulfilment. Other memories, as of Hannah, are short-spanned memories of humanity or the anthropological history.

In their experience of time and space in death too, there is a marked difference. For Viola, there is a confusion in the psychological experience of time within the space of the house. There is an obvious microscoping and telescoping of time within the spatiality of the house. This collapse—of the way time is experienced—in turn makes the house’s space microscopic and telescopic in nature which further experience with the ghost concerned. The collapse and overturning of the spatial continuum are presented via the microscoping of the large Manor ground into the compacter dimension of Viola’s coffin, and also in the telescoping of the Manor into a universe unto itself with herself at the centre.

The same collapse and overturning in the temporal dimension are shown where there is a microscoping of the experiences of separation and death—seen in the brevity of the actual death scenes in the entire series, and also a telescoping of the last moments right after death unto the complete loss of the sense of identity or unto facelessness. The telescoping of temporality is the aspect most focussed as is seen in the expansion of the final moments right before the onset of the oblivion of death into entire cinematic episodes dedicated one to each character before everything falls into place with the final episode that focusses entirely on Viola turning into a faceless revenant of Bly Manor.

Furthermore, the ghostly haunting by the temporal vagrancy of Viola and the others is an attempt to try to live despite the event of death. Viola’s temporal disruption lies in the cause of her unfinished task of meeting her daughter which she might only be able to do not in the afterlife but if she dies and meets her daughter. In Hannah’s case, her temporal confusion and jumps are due to the figurative death as in forgetting and out-of-body experiences and amnesia. In waiting for a complete acceptance of her real and literal death, she tries to re-live what she can. Her knowledge of the impossibility of her real death to happen, till Viola’s will to be is intact, makes her even more desperate to not let those memories fade and for identity to be lost in a blur. Also, her knowledge of the fates of the other ghosts and of her own fate as one of the many ghosts haunting Bly Manor makes her reiterate to herself the basics of her identity and the time-space context wherein she finds herself—“You are Hannah Grose. The year is 1987. You are at Bly” (episode 5; 00:03:15). The jumps in her



memories disorient her, yet she persists in retaining her identity until her final death. It reflects her fear of suffering an afterlife similar to that of the faceless ghosts; a subsuming into the vaster spacetime entity.

Viola, on the other hand, had given up this persistence and replaced it with what has earlier been described as a refusal to accept the not-happening of the expected. Hers becomes a refusal to accept that what was expected often does not come to pass and the concomitant lack of preparation for such a situation which thwarts expectations. Her adamancy about not dying had not predicted the ruthlessness of an afterlife where identity is lost and the fulfilment of desire is not guaranteed. In the namelessness of her prolonged afterlife, Viola forgets the reasons of her identity-less state but retains an anger for being in it. Her loneliness which had brought death on some hapless people is contained in the identity that Dani provides her. Dani's beingness only angers Viola into action, that is to take away her life but it brings a peace on the estate which is no longer an expansive personal coffin but a collective graveyard of the memories and lives lived on the grounds.

### **Conclusion: Memory, Ghosts and Identity**

The idea proposed here is that spatial identity, by which the reference made is to the identity derived from relationality and the feeling of belongingness to a place, plays an integral part in memory-making, and it also has an important part to play in the totality of personal identity for an individual. Disruptions and fluctuations in spatial identity is reflected in a breakdown of identity as well as of memory. The characters of Hannah and Viola represent this breakdown in their peculiar ways which brings dimensionality to the haunted narrative. Both are parallel to each other in the ways in which they experience their identity building and dismantling in tandem with their relation with the house. The Manor emplaces their living as well as their death and extends into their haunting.

Furthermore, this argument supports the relationality of persona to the memories constituted by a space. The blurring, fading, (re-)membering and re-living of memories as a telescoping of those moments right before the final death by effacing of the corpus, marks the finality of death of the individual which entails an erasing the identity. The link between memory, physicality, and identity

is therefore proposed to be due to the spatiality of the same. A critique of this argument can be about the ghostliness and identity construction for the placeless, the spaceless, and the homeless. It is proposed that this aspect be analysed through those monsters which are not localised, as zombies and revenants, and those which attune and accustom themselves to the spaces which they occupy, as aliens and jinns.

### **Notes**

1. Theorists have discussed mind and memory as a landscape. Sigmund Freud gave the iceberg model of the unconscious; Hermann Ebbinghaus studied memory and forgetting (replicated in Murre and Dros (2015)); Loftus (2003) studied make-belief memories.
2. Romain Lindsey's review of this series uses the term 'gothic romance' in the title but does not elaborate on it.
3. The use of the term used for computer's storage memory 'byte' as an analogy explains how each memory the characters retain, play, and replay occupies a temporal-spatial unit. The playing and re-playing of a memory in terms of how much of it is a kind of cache memory—used again and again—can explain why it is included in the moments of Hannah's death.
4. It has been discussed in detail by Hugo Münsterberg (1916) and Arnheim (1933), deployed philosophically by Suzanne Langer (1953) and can be interpreted in the cinematic presentation by Federico Fellini in his *La Citta Delle Donne* (or *City of Women*; 1980).
5. Various terms have been developed to describe this; 'Life Review' by Greyson, 'Visual life review experience' by King, and 'visual life review experience' by Parnia et al.
6. Edmund Wilson, Camille Paglia and Jack Morgan hold conflicting opinions on the governess as projecting the diabolical upon the circumstances at the Bly estate. Morgan notes that Paglia seems to entertain the projective reading that "[t]he ghosts may be emanations of her own double-sexed imagination" (Paglia 613)—and the objective one simultaneously, but he does not take up the latter direction into consideration.

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## **Healing the World: An Exploration of Connectivity and Collective Spirit in *The Overstory***

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the impact of modern ways of living in nature, in the context of *The Overstory* (2018) of Richard Powers. It argues that *The Overstory* sheds light on the ecological disaster that the world is facing now. The crisis has a deeper connection with the market-driven consumerism of capitalistic societies. Under the changing socio-economic structure, the political system and its laws, nature-friendly cultural values have lost their implications. The growing individualism threatens the collective welfare of biodiversity. The radical loss of ecological sensitivity and ethical ways of living severely compromises the delicate and balanced relationship between humans and nature. Therefore, we need ecological healing to revive the collective spirit and strengthen connectivity. To examine the problem represented in the text, the study method is a qualitative approach to eco-critical reading. The analysis of the narratives shows that Richard Powers raises the issue of the ecology of global concern. For this, he crafts the narratives of rebellious characters who defy the authority to save the trees. Under the guidance of ethics and ecological sensitivity, these characters hug the trees and resist felling them. Their campaign, to awaken the sensitivity to nature, calls for the urgency of nature-saving actions. Since we are reeling under the environmental crisis, we must reawaken the ecological sensitivity with eco-friendly culture and environmental ethics. It also demands to neutralization of capitalism's ills and a search for an alternative that embraces sustainable principles and balances human-nature relations.

**Keywords:** Ecology, Capitalism, Memory, Culture, Ethics, Eco-Critical, Sustainable, Consumerism

*The Overstory* (2018) by Richard Powers represents the compelling issue of human-nature relations with the aim of self-reflexivity. To review our present relationship with nature in the context of environmental crisis, Powers creates a narrative that raises questions about modern lifestyle and its impact on nature. Reading the narrative from the eco-critical perspective, the paper argues that the world is reeling under an ecological crisis since the forests and the landscape that harbour millions of species are under attack. The rise of this dismal situation, as the characters' narratives reveal, is largely due to the consumerism of capitalism and its growing materialistic culture. The self-centred entrepreneurship with materialistic quest and urban-centric artificial lifestyle of the present age remains indifferent to the collective existence of species. The immediate concern for self-fulfilment at the cost of ecological balance aggravates the sustainability of nature.

The tie between myopic politics and an unsustainable economy bolsters a materialistic consumer culture that compromises with environmental ethics and sustainability. The industrialists use technology that is hostile to nature, like tree-cutting machinery, in the narrative, fails to uphold the principle of sustainability. Nature shaped some cultures, so they valued nature. The loss of the memory of cultures that are close to nature works as one of the elements for the rise of ecological crisis. To heal the harm inflicted on nature, it is worthy to quote Patrick D. Murphy's view of understanding ecology. He stresses, "Ecology can be a means for learning how to live appropriately in a particular place and time, to preserve, contribute to and recycle the ecosystem" (194). So, learning to live with a sensitivity to the preservation of nature and a sense of duty to contribute can arouse hope for a better future. That is unlikely to happen with the argument of the loggers, who see the old trees as money: "These trees are going to die and fall over. They should be harvested while they're ripe, not wasted" (360). Watchman, a forest saver, rejects this consumerist view. He launches the verbal attack, "Great. Let's grind up your grandfather for dinner, while he still has some meat on him" (360). He implies that an attack on the forest is like an attack on your dear grandfather. This degree of attachment to trees reveals the level of consciousness to save nature. The loud voice of Watchman

comes with the message that people like him, cannot remain silent while the existence of living beings comes under threat.

In his interview, Richard Powers shares that he got the inspiration to create the narrative around trees from redwood trees while teaching at Stanford University, USA. He feels attached to the trees, and he maintains this bond between his characters and trees in different contexts. The nine major characters of the narrative, who represent diverse backgrounds, participate in the tree-saving mission. Some of these characters, like Nicholas Hoel and Mimi Ma, inherit tree-saving cultures from their families. It is the legacy of the Hoel family to capture the photographs of the family chestnut tree and hand over the photos to the new generation. The Hoel descendants follow the same tradition. Mimi gets rings with the image of trees from her father. Later, she devotes herself to saving the forest. Their growing awareness of deforestation and climate change encourages the leading characters to launch a tree-saving campaign. As they try to translate the commitment to practice in the forest, they must confront the social, political and legal hurdles. Under the protection of legislation, the forest-cutting industries operate for profit. So, the epicentre of the battle is the forest. It is between tree-cutting timber industries and tree-saving green revolutionaries. It is satirical that tree-cutting is legal and saving becomes illegal. To resist the forest destruction, the green revolutionaries' resort to the violence of burning tree-cutting machinery. Consequently, the authority arrests them and puts them in prison. The tree-saver, Olivia, sacrifices her life for the sake of the forest. The major characters, Nicholas, Mimi, Adam, Ray, Dorothy, Douglas, Neelay and Patricia draw themselves to each other for the cause of the tree. The novelist constructs situations where the seed of a forest-saving spirit develops in the characters.

### **Loss of Trees, the Metaphors of Diversity**

*The Overstory* glorifies trees for their potentialities. It sets the contexts for different possibilities of symbolic interpretation. Trees hold the potential to transcend visible existence. A man in the narrative calls them, "Forever in motion, these stationary things" (443). Powers probably implies that trees travel miles through the waves of chemistry that emanate from them. Another way to spread is



through insects, birds and animals which carry trees' elements, like seeds and others, to distant places. Otherwise, their motion is through roots that expand to a long distance. But this travel limits itself to certain areas compared to another one that defies the borders. Humans can draw inspiration from trees for resilience and strength to offer something to others through constructive acts.

As a material object, a tree can satisfy our needs for furniture and other tools of necessity. However, its magnitude goes beyond these visible needs. It holds the key to running life through oxygen and multiplies organisms by offering shelter and food. As needed, it assumes different roles. Adam, a psychologist in the narrative, examines its usefulness, "The fruit flesh has a smell that curdles thought; pulp kills even drug-resistant bacteria. The fan-shaped leaves with their radiating veins are said to cure the sickness of forgetting" (551). These are but a few known worldly things of trees. What about the unknown?

Trees' outer mortality or decay becomes illusive when their underground system, roots, remain alive for thousands of years. So, a tree becomes the text of history. For instance, the tree-sitters settle in the ancient giant tree, Mimas, for months to save it from the tree-loggers. This tree bears the memory of hundreds of years. So, the loss of this historical text, the tree of magnitude, is the loss of memory metaphorically.

Neelay Mehta, a child of the Indian diaspora living in the USA, who breaks his spinal cord falling from an oak tree, creates video games. He employs his creative potential to fulfil his wishes of covering the empirical world with greenery. He meets his wishes in the virtual world of gaming. Otherwise, they remain dry in reality. His virtual forest can flourish much faster than an empirical forest. Mehta's ideal green project gets its foothold in his creativity. His father ignites his curiosity to plunge into the world of exploration and possibilities. The father does so with an example of a seed, "You, see? If Vishnu can put one of these giant figs into a seed this big . . . Just think what we might fit into our machine" (117). He refers to Vishnu as the God of Hindus. So, the computer, a machine in the hand of Neelay, can give rise to the magic of metaphoric trees, which can defy the empirical barriers to their growth and challenge the impact of time.

Trees also transcend the physical sphere to connect with spirituality regarding cultural practices. Powers draws instances from myths and cultures to evidence the supernatural dimension of trees. Both the Gods and humans transform into trees. In Greek mythology, Daphne transforms into a bay laurel to avoid the catch and harm from the God Apollo. Similarly, Apollo converts a boy, Cyparissus, into a cypress, a tree (147). In the context of Hindu societies, they worship tulsi/basil as an incarnation of Lakshmi, the Goddess. So, a basil embodies the Goddess. Deity transforms into a plant. And a specific plant becomes a deity for the worshippers. Trees' magnitude defies the disciplinary borders since its discourse spreads across Science and Humanities, including spirituality. With limited knowledge, one misses the totality of appreciation of trees. When we lose the element of such value, how do we compensate with money or commodity? In the language of metaphor, if we choose such an alternative, we exchange our existence with the trifle toys of short-term pleasure.

### **Culture, Political Economy and Ecological Crisis**

In the context of *The Overstory*, the ecological crisis is the outcome of the political economy and the loss of eco-friendly culture. As politics shapes the mode of economy, the economy also structures the political system. So, the interaction between politics and economy offers the possibilities for the people to practice cultures, and politics and engage in economic activities. The social mechanism, under the regulation of laws, that the government implements is a part of politics. So, politics formulates economic policies and programs. And culture cannot remain untouched by the interactions between them. Therefore, it is essential to examine the intersection of politics, economy and culture.

The author paints a dismal picture of human-nature relations as the narrative unfolds the growing clash between the eco-savers and the government and industries regarding forests. The modern American lifestyle is hostile to the sustainability of nature as the characters can convince a limited number of people to protest tree cutting. The majority of Americans do not show concerns about ecological welfare. Individual comfort undermines the collective good. Observing the unhealthy lifestyle, Adam Appich critiques, "Human-kind is deeply ill. The species won't last long" (70). The illness of humanity emerges from its greed for prosperity and comfort and kills the

sensitivity to the delicacy of nature. The ailment fails to give meaning in isolation as it is deeply rooted in cultural degeneration. The culture that gave space to nature no longer remains the same as it comes under the pressure of a capitalistic economy. However, Adam sees the possibility of recovery of collective lives through our intelligence. The interconnectedness of species can be reawakened if human intelligence works in constructive ways. The role of science and technology becomes instrumental in the nature-saving mission as it holds the potential to explore sustainability. The reviewer, Wai Chee Dimock, sees the possibility of survival of the unfit also if we develop a collective spirit (144). Even the weak species can survive in the world if they get support from other species. It questions Darwin's theory of the survival of the fittest. The chain of connectivity does not differentiate between fit and unfit but binds them together so that they become one or part of a totality. So, collective existence offers the possibility of individual survival, which becomes impossible in isolation.

Patricia Westerford also observes that trees are in trouble. The forests of the world are meeting the blight of human greed (275). If human greed works to threaten the existence of trees, people should be self-reflective to be aware of the underlying cause of their suffering and other species. To address the present ecological crisis, Patricia underscores the necessity of understanding ecological connectivity and collective spirit. She argues, "There are no individuals in a forest, no separate events" (273). All the elements of nature are interconnected and shape one another. So, individual existence is not individual as it relies on a larger mechanism of existence. For Jonathan Damery, the forest is a metaphor that incorporates humans also. The affinity of characters with trees reflects this (33). The modern cultures that differentiate themselves in binary relation to nature claim that it is the culture that teaches people how to utilize nature for their benefit. This perspective to understand nature in opposition to culture is faulty as it fails to examine the intricacies between nature and culture. Jhan Hochman also agrees that connections exist between nature and culture. However, he argues that nature and culture should not be brought together forcefully by naturalizing culture and vice versa. If they do so, more harm is done to nature than to culture (192). He underscores that humans

should give independent status to nature and not impose anthropocentric views on it. He sounds logical. However, the present researcher views that to address the present ecological crisis, it is necessary to value the role of nature in shaping the culture. As we examine human nature relations, the nature-culture interaction needs attention. So, if trees are in trouble, humans remain no exception because they are parts of an interconnected existence.

The power of capitalism is that it creates desires for commodities and money. The motivation for luxury promotes individualism. Consequently, the culture that implants the values of collective welfare of both humans and non-humans gets eroded. Against the capitalistic tendency of ownership, Mimi Ma comments, “Money you lose by slowing down is always more important than the money you’ve already made” (306). The spell of capitalism is that it triggers a quest for money; the quest never gets satisfied. The desire for more undermines how much someone has already earned. Mimi sounds true in her view that present earnings are more important than previously earned. This is the driving force that converts every resource of nature into money. The principle of fulfilling the needs with sustainability contradicts the money-making formula of capitalism. In the narrative, the timber industries embrace this formula. Their aggressive operation of tree-cutting day and night illustrates how serious is their business for money. As they meet resistance from the tree-savers, the industries lament the growing loss and try to justify the act of cutting as a part of investment under legal provisions. These industries have ties with the government as they contribute to jobs and the economy. More importantly, they pay the taxes and the government does not want to lose the income by changing the policy and laws to protect forests. Seeing this scenario, Adam becomes rebellious and expresses his commitment to recovery, “Justice for ninety-nine percent. The jailing of financial traitors and thieves. An eruption of fairness and decency on all continents. The overthrow of capitalism. A happiness not born of rape and greed” (532). Adam argues that one percent of rich people who reap the benefits of investments are causing injustice to ninety-nine percent. He wants people to overthrow capitalism as it promotes greed. He seeks happiness that emanates from selflessness. His choice of words: traitors, thieves, rape and greed, to refer to the actions of capitalist

evidences how harshly he critiques the nature-harming acts of industries. So, what the tree-savers are fighting for is justice. And justice is not only for humans but also for every species on the planet. Since this battle is the battle for the existence of millions of species, the green revolutionaries hold the right to raise their voice for lives and they uphold the moral principles to speak for all living species.

Richard Powers critiques the rationality of utilizing nature for the sake of humans. For Bradford Morrow and Richard Powers, the essence of the narrative is a rejection of human exceptionalism (59). They interpret *The Overstory* with the view of accepting all the elements of nature that make human existence possible. So, they deny the assumption that humans are more important than others. To substantiate such an assumption, Powers illustrates the anthropocentric view of Immanuel Kant, “All exists merely as a means to an end. That end is man” (314). So, Kant takes nature for granted for the use of privileged humans. His view overlooks the existence of non-human species. This view compromises with the ethics and duty of humanity to nature. Such a perspective promotes consumerism that is fatal to ecological sensitivity. The rationality that compromises with the collective welfare fails to offer a long-lasting solution to the problem that the world is facing now.

The philosophies and logic that serve the interests of humans at the cost of ecological balance are detrimental to humanity itself as we cannot imagine human existence and happiness in isolation. For instance, Powers writes, “The hottest year ever measured comes and goes ... almost every one of them among the hottest in recorded history” (467). The issues of climate change and global warming are the consequences of human-centred activities that overlook the ethics of sustainability. The timber industries, like Humboldt, make money out of trees. As represented in the narrative, the money-making businesses fall short of ethics that balance the individual interests and collective welfare of species. When both politics and business operate without ethics, they compromise with the fundamental ground for life. So, in the narrative, neither the government nor the timber industries heed the concerns of the tree-savers. They simply see trees as commodities for the transaction and

fail to perceive that a tree harbours thousands of species, seen and unseen. But Patricia can examine its potentiality. She claims, “A dead tree is an infinite hotel” (353). What a dead tree can offer is beyond general comprehension. The business industries lack this sensitivity or they become insensitive purposefully so that money-making mantras work without ethics. The timber industries follow the laws, but the laws are hostile to nature. So, the problems go beyond industries. They extend to the government and its political system: laws and cultures that are under the influence of consumerism. To change this mode of living, we need alternatives that are healthier for humans and nature. The novelist envisions such alternatives. The roles of the characters and their expressions support environmental justice. Olivia discloses her project to her father, “The most wondrous products of four billion years of life need help” (211). These wondrous products are trees. She decides to act as a volunteer for the great cause of saving them. She commits to fighting for the justice of millions of species. Olivia sacrifices her life while saving the forest. Another character, a tree researcher, Patricia, reveals unknown facts about the forest. Her in-depth knowledge, supported by scientific evidence, prepares a ground to justify her claim that trees have connections and can communicate with each other (159). As the narrative revolves around the tree-saving characters and their mission, Powers creates a situation where biodiversity speaks in diverse languages. However, they succeed in communicating with each other due to interconnectedness. Or, nature’s species understand its language.

Culture as a memory survives over generations. In *The Overstory*, memory keeps some human-nature relations alive. For instance, Jorgen Hoel from Norway settles in Iowa, USA. He plants six chestnuts on his farm, around which no trees are visible. Hoel nurtures the trees with this thought, “One day, my children will shake the trunks and eat for free” (7). Out of them, three chestnuts survive. As they grow massive, the Hoel farm gets recognition for chestnuts. They get high value. Jorgen dies but the legacy of the protection of chestnuts transfers to his son, John, who preserves their memory in photography. Taking photos of chestnuts for future use has become a family tradition. So, over the generations, the pile of photographs keeps the memory of chestnuts alive. The legacy of preserving

trees makes space in the mind of young Nicholas Hoel. He becomes a part of the tree-saving campaign. It is his family culture that associates him with trees. And he discharges his obligation with love and sincerity. This illustration evidences that human-nature relations can develop in the form of culture. And revival of such culture offers the possibility of restoring the spirit of respecting nature. Patricia Westerford possesses such spirit. As a researcher on trees for years, she aligns herself with them. Her happiness and existence lie in them. So, she sets a mission of collecting seeds of rare species of plants to save them from extinction. The seeds themselves are the in-built memory of trees as they hold the potential to grow into immense trees. Patricia's efforts can radiate inspiration and be a memory for the new generations to follow the tree-saving culture. Thus, the memory of culture is one way to revive the previous healthy relations between humans and nature.

Ancient cultures developed with nature. People learnt the key strategies of survival from nature. So, the development of nature-friendly culture paved the way for the balance of human-nature relations. In this relation, humans are sensitive to the delicacy of ecological connectivity and use the resources as per their genuine needs, unlike the consumerist culture. In the study of myths, Claude Levi-Strauss brings structuralism in harmony with nature. He defends how structuralism does not limit itself to abstractions, rather well-grounded on reality as it teaches people to love and respect nature and its living beings. With this approach, we can better understand living species and they are the sources of aesthetic pleasure for humans from the beginning (134). Traditional societies worship nature, such as rivers, trees, animals, and land. For instance, there are tree-worshipping cultures globally: oak in Britain, kapos in Mayan, sycamore in Egypt and ginkgo in China (269). Others, in Nepal and India, Bar, Pipal and Tulasi (basil) are worshipped by people as deities. The tree-worshippers do not destroy them for the sake of money. The Chipko movement of the 1970s in India is another example of conservation efforts by women against the commercial logging of forests. Such efforts are crucial to protect the ecosystem. However, the governments mercilessly crush them in the interest of capitalism. Governments fail to uphold environmental ethics due to their immediate concerns about meeting the economic needs of the people. As Powers presents in the American

context, the way timber industries operate is hostile to nature but beneficial for a capitalistic economy. Populist politics undermines the principle of sustainable economy and development.

Powers draws attention towards the common origin of humans and plants. Through Patricia, he foregrounds the base of common existence. She reads from *The Secret Forest*, “You and the tree in your backyard come from a common ancestor . . . that tree and you still share a quarter of your genes. . .” (166). The idea of common origin reminds us that we share so much with trees. Patricia further argues that we have shaped the forests, and they shaped us even before we evolved into *Homo Sapiens* (567).

As tree-cutting industries run their business aggressively, the peaceful protest turns into violence. The timber industries assault even the rare, valuable, and very old chestnuts. The slogan sounds true to their acts, “This State Supports Timber: Timber Supports This State” (357). The collusion between the state and industries makes it hard for the green savers to fight. So, the protestors resort to the violence of arson to destroy the timber-cutting machinery. For that act, they are charged with domestic terrorism. As the American federal government fails to address their demands of saving the forest through the new legislation, it tries to brush them aside in the name of terrorism. Rather than calling protesters for negotiation to end the protest, the government tags them as terrorists so that it can go against them. The tree-savers get long-term imprisonment. The ending of the narrative does not arouse optimism to resolve the crisis peacefully but indicates that nature protectors should be ready to face the challenges. They may have to sacrifice personally and socially to exert pressure on the political machinery for the anticipated change.

The American government makes no effort, though the tree-savers continuously protest tree-felling. On top of that, the court decides against Douglas who plants fifty thousand trees alone. As he cannot bear to see the trees being cut, he tries to hinder the drive. Consequently, the court charges him, “The defendant obstructed a job being done by a tree-cutting company on city orders in the dead of the night” (253). Douglas gets a penalty for stopping the cutting business. Ironically, this is the reward for saving nature. As the state machinery implements the so-called laws, the violators have to



pay the cost. The state does not act as the sensitive apparatus to differentiate the protest of a good cause from a bad one. Therefore, it makes the actors serve the prison as terrorists since they uphold the noble cause of saving the ecosystem. The state authority puts Adam, the professor of psychology, and his friends behind bars.

The tree-savers critique the capitalistic culture that subdues nature and they question individualism that undermines connectivity and the collective spirit. Seeing nature from the perspective of satisfying personal greed, only invites the ecological catastrophe. So, Patricia reads from a book, “No one sees trees. We see fruit, we see nuts, we see wood. . . we see a cash crop. But trees—trees are invisible” (529). This consumerist perspective overshadows the existence of a tree in totality. The slogan, “Control kills/ connection heals,” questions such perspective. The slogan means that individual ownership of resources is against the collective well-being. It underscores the necessity of understanding the importance of connectivity among the species to heal the ecological wound.

## **Conclusion**

The present study stresses to review of our ways of living as it questions whether the economic mode of capitalism contributes to a sustainable economy and development. After examination of the connection between politics, economy, and culture in the narrative, it uncovers that without ethics in politics and business, we may amass property and add facilities but weaken the sustainability of nature. The declining forest and issue of climate change in the narrative expose the vulnerability of ways of living. So, to heal the impairment, what are the alternatives? The revival of the memory of nature-friendly culture, ethical consumption to satisfy genuine needs, and awareness of collective well-being and connectivity among the species of the world, contribute to the balance of human-nature relations. Ethical politics to craft nature-friendly laws and practice of culture with ecological sensitivity, as Patricia sees a dead tree as an infinite hotel, can contribute to recovering the loss and resolving the present ecological crisis.

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## **Minority Voices and Environmental Disparities: An Ecofeminist Critique of Indira Goswami's *The Blue-Necked God***

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**Abstract:** This research paper explores the ecological imbalances shown in *The Blue-Necked God* by Indira Goswami. It investigates the complex interrelation between gender-related concerns and the deterioration of the natural environment. It effectively depicts a society characterized by the brutal exploitation of resources of the environment, water pollution, and widespread deforestation, all justified under the guise of advancement and economic expansion. Against this contextual backdrop, it explores the subtle connection between patriarchal power systems and the oppression of women, as it relates to the narrative of environmental degradation. It also explores the portrayal of female characters whose lives are deeply connected to nature. This paper examines how political and economic patriarchal structure perpetuates ecological harm. The Eco-feministic approach highlights the need to acknowledge the inseparable connection between environmental degradation and the oppression of women. This approach ultimately promotes the pursuit of a future that is both fair and sustainable.

**Keywords:** Ecofeminism, Environmental Degradation, Oppression, Women, Nature

### **Introduction**

In the realm of Indian literature, particularly within the Assamese literary arena, Indira Goswami, also known as Mamoni Raisom Goswami, occupies an important position. Indira Goswami is a well-known figure in the field of Indian literature. She received the Jnanpith Award in the year 2000, considered to be the highest literary award in India. She is widely renowned in the literary world. Goswami, born in 1942 in the state of Assam, which is well-known for the cultural and historical value of its territory, was introduced to the world of literature at a young age. The family atmosphere

in which she was raised, which was characterized by a strong participation with intellectual and cultural interests, was a significant component that led to the development of her aptitude for literature. This played a significant role in the development of her skills. An indelible impression has been made on the landscape of Indian writing by Goswami's captivating narrative style. As a result, she has garnered a great deal of attention and appreciation within literary circles.

*The Blue-Necked God* sheds light on the fundamental contradictions that are present within patriarchal Hinduism and how it makes use of religious traditions as a means to explain the subjugation of their female members. *The Blue-Necked God* sheds light on the anguish and distress endured by the Radheshyamis, who are the unfortunate widows of Vrindavan. These Radheshyamis reside in the holy city to find peace and consolation for their damaged minds. Furthermore, it highlights the existence of gender-based discrepancies throughout the entirety of Hindu culture, notably about the different expectations and treatment of men and women. It is possible to interpret the oppression of women as a breach of natural law. When viewed in this light, the natural world and women become synonymous. The selected work investigates the significant debate over the relationship between people and the natural environment. In the novel, the city of Vrindavan is portrayed which is experiencing a considerable decline in its environmental conditions. To illustrate the negative effects of this shift, she draws attention to the fact that the city's cherished woodlands have been transformed into accommodations and religious structures. She gives a thorough examination of the complex relationship that exists between the exploitation of women and the destruction of the environment and highlights the interconnectivity of these two phenomena. Audiences who have a vested interest in the issues that women face, the environment, and the prospects of humanity continue to be influenced by this literary work in a long-lasting way. The progressive stance it takes on environmental issues and the feminist perspective it holds are two of the things that set it apart.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate how she establishes the connection between the destruction of the natural world and the subjugation of women. The narrative places particular

emphasis on how it illustrates ecological imbalances and the complex relationship that exists between gender concerns. Within environments, this theory proposes that the exploitation of nature and gender inequality are inextricably linked and mutually reinforce one another.

Françoise d'Eaubonne was a prominent figure in French literature, known for her contributions as a novelist, labour rights advocate, environmentalist, and feminist. In her publication in 1974, titled “Le Féminisme ou la Mort,” she introduced the concept of ecofeminism, intertwining connections between the exploitation of women based on caste, class, gender, and race, as well as the devastation of nature, is what constitutes this phenomenon. From the perspective of Sherry Ortner, an anthropologist, it is generally accepted that women have a stronger connection with the natural world than men do. A significant portion of their life, particularly in more rural places, revolves around it. There is just one reason to consider women and nature to be the same: their capacity for reproduction and raising children. The primary idea behind ecofeminism is the intertwining of women with the natural world. Several women in developing countries live close to the natural environment. It plays a crucial role in a significant portion of their activities, particularly in traditional and rural areas. However, the deterioration of the ecosystem has an impact on them. Tribal people rely on wood for both their means of subsistence and for medicinal needs. This underprivileged segment of society is impacted by deforestation. The study of ecofeminism looks into how humans oppress women and non-human worlds, and how this power imbalance affects both. They believe that patriarchy is the source of all forms of social injustice, including racism, caste, gender, and class, as well as the exploitation of nature.

Ecofeminism is a significant theoretical paradigm that asserts that there is a fundamental connection between the subjugation of women and the destruction of the environment. This draws attention to the intrinsic relationship that exists between the two. This correlation adds validity to the idea that patriarchal cultural systems purposely accentuate both features, which is supported by the fact that this connection exists. The exploitation of the environment and the enslavement of women are interconnected phenomena that manifest themselves as a result of a particular perspective that

emphasises dominance and control, which is typically articulated through hierarchical social customs, according to this theoretical paradigm. According to this, the enslavement of women and the exploitation of the environment are interconnected phenomena. In other words, the perception that men are superior to women is the basic variable contributing to such phenomena. In the course of this investigation, we will investigate the massive quantities of ecofeminist literature that are available. Greta Gaard claims that “ecofeminism’s basic premise is that the ideology which authorises oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature” (1).

Vandana Shiva, a prominent Indian environmental activist and an advocate for food sovereignty, has gained widespread recognition for her contributions to the field of ecofeminism. It examines the correlation between the exploitation and deterioration of the environment and the subjugation and oppression of women. Shiva’s ecofeminist perspective encompasses a diverse range of concerns, including but not limited to biodiversity, biotechnology, sustainable agriculture, and the empowerment of women, with a special emphasis on the context of developing nations. She argues that contemporary scientific and technological advancements, under the influence of patriarchal and capitalist agendas, not only have detrimental effects on the environment but also perpetuate gender disparities. The focal point of her research lies in highlighting the significance of traditional knowledge and customs, particularly those about rural women in India, in the conservation of biodiversity and maintenance of ecological equilibrium. Through her advocacy for organic farming and opposition to genetically modified foods, Shiva establishes a direct correlation between environmental health and the overall welfare of individuals and communities. She emphasises the significant contribution of women in the fields of agriculture and resource management, underscoring their pivotal role as agents of change in combating environmental degradation. Her perspective presents a compelling analysis of the influence exerted by multinational corporate entities on the environment and gender parity.

The work of Goswami is renowned for its complete description of the complicated connection that exists between societal standards and environmental circumstances. This is a fact that is widely acknowledged. Concerning the overall relevance of the work, it is precisely this relationship that is responsible. Her works of art usually dive into the complexities of Assamese society, shedding light on the struggles and resiliency displayed by the people who live there, with a special emphasis on women, against the backdrop of the natural issues that they face. She does this by putting the spotlight on the people who live there. The fact that women are disproportionately affected by these challenges is brought to the attention of the audience by her. When she played a pioneering role in bringing these issues to the fore, she took the regional environmental concerns of Assam, such as of deforestation, flooding, and soil erosion into the larger arena of literary discourse.

A significant ecological imbalance has occurred within the holy city of Vrindavan, which is located in India. *The Blue-Necked God* provides a powerful critique of this imbalance. Goswami's depiction of the urban environment is marked by a broad degree of pollution, substantial deforestation, and the relentless exploitation of its natural resources. These are the characteristics that define the urban environment. Vrindavan is confronted with many physical and social issues, including the precarious situation of its widows, the destruction of its sacred sites, and the declining animal population. These challenges are direct manifestations of the ecological imbalance that exists in the region. An experience that is traumatic for a widow is the loss of her husband, which leaves a huge gap in her life and causes her to experience a profound sense of loss. Hence, the experience of being a widow for a woman is a shocking occurrence in her life. The situation that millions of widows in India are forced to endure and from which they never fully recover. Trauma can be caused by several significant factors, including the passing of a loved one or the occurrence of an incident. It may be the consequence of a terrible occurrence that has a long-lasting effect on the mental and emotional health of the particular victim. Through the process of deforestation that has taken place in the Braj region, this work provides a significant depiction of the ecological imbalance. As a result of the deforestation that has taken place in the region surrounding Vrindavan to make room for

agricultural activities and development, the city is now susceptible to the effects of environmental variables. Because of this, there has been a visible increase in the amount of soil erosion, the number of instances of floods, and the amount of air pollution. There are so many temples and other religious institutions located within the city of Vrindavan, which contributes greatly to the city's already high level of pollution. Incense and wood are both sources of harmful pollutants that are released into the atmosphere when they are burned at these precise locations. The mistreatment towards Radheshyamis is also evident when the author talks about the extensive destruction of the forests around and within Vrindavan. "The branches and twigs of some of these (trees) had dried up and looked like thin, dry, fish bones" (Goswami 2).

During their everyday activities, widows were forced to engage in street begging as a means of sustaining themselves due to the adverse impacts of pollution, which disproportionately affects widows in the city. "These women were compelled to sing even if they were starving" (Goswami 23). The mismanagement of Vrindavan's natural resources contributes to the worsening of the ecological imbalance that exists there. The Yamuna River, which flows through the metropolitan landscape, is subjected to a substantial amount of pollution due to the discharge of sewage and garbage from industrial processes. As a direct result, the river's water quality has degraded to the point where it is no longer safe for consumption or use in maintaining personal hygiene. There has been a significant decrease in the city's water table as a consequence of the excessive exploitation of groundwater in the town. It impacts the local animal population due to the environmental imbalance in Vrindavan. As a consequence of cutting down trees and polluting the environment, the number of birds that live in the Braj region has decreased. Most of the time, the cows that are revered as sacred creatures are neglected and mistreated. This is a common occurrence. Because they are driven to engage for food within urban areas, they regularly come into contact with an increased risk of catching illnesses.

The Blue-necked God provides a profound ecofeminist perspective by presenting a painful investigation of female characters and their challenging connection with the environment. Their lives are constrained by the rigorous religious practices and societal expectations that are prevalent in the



religious community. In this tough actual world, Goswami successfully blends the characters' contacts with the environment, so weaving a complicated thread of dependency and communal anguish. This is accomplished through the use of the environment. In Vrindavan, the existence of widows is inextricably related to the Yamuna River, which is an essential source of nourishment for the society. Therefore, the river is an integral part of the community. Furthermore, their daily rituals, prayers, and overall survival are inextricably connected with the ebb and flow of the river. Priests ask young widows who live in poor housing to live with them. They solicit sexual favours from these vulnerable widows in return for offering "protection" against other males. At the Biharimohan Kunj temple, Sashiprova was forced to live with the priest Alamgarhi as his mistress. She recounted her humiliation in front of Mrinalini. "One day he asked me to disrobe completely in front of him and I did. He scrutinized my body thoroughly in the light of the lamp" (Goswami 59). However, the river, which was once considered to be a sign of untaintedness and purity, was subjected to contamination and degeneration as a result of human acts. This is a representation of the horrible circumstances that the widows are currently experiencing. The desolation of the river, which is defined by the substitution of its once-active ecosystem with stagnant waters and devastating aromas, acts as a metaphor for the widows' emotional experience of being cut off from others and losing their feeling of dignity.

A woman is considered a man's property in a patriarchal society. Prior to marriage, she relies on her father and subsequently, on her husband, and following his demise, she must depend on either her child or her husband's family. Women and nature both silently endure men's cruelty and mistreatment. Unseasonal precipitation, drying out of the Yamuna River, and reduction in forest size exemplify the degradation of nature caused by humans. "The water was starting to dry up and there was around mass of sand in the middle of the river" (Goswami 26).

Carol Adams brings ecofeminism a fresh perspective by addressing both women's and animals' exploitation. Animals are as integral to Earth as humans are. However, men perceive animals as 'other' and use them to serve their benefit. Goswami empathizes with animals and illustrates their

deplorable treatment by humans. She illustrates how the livestock carts are laden with such weight that it becomes impossible for the bullocks to pull them. The people who own the bullocks become insensitive to the suffering of the animals due to their selfishness, “necks of poor bullocks almost touched the ground under sheer weight” (Goswami 10). Within the natural environment, they receive a glimpse of a realm that is free from the taint of human depravity by observing the stunning greenery, the vibrant colours, and the soothing sounds. These statements provide the impression that there is a significant connection between women and the natural world. This connection evokes a sense of belonging that stands in stark contrast to the fact that women are not by the rules of society. The narrative moreover underlines the bravery of the widows and their potential to locate consolation within the realm of nature. Individuals, despite the challenges they are confronted with, find comfort in the presence of many species of birds, insects, and arboreal critters, thereby forming a strong connection with the plants and animals that are located in their immediate proximity. The existence of these links is indicative of a profound regard for the natural world, which acknowledges the natural world’s inherent value that goes beyond the usefulness of humans. Goswami’s ecofeminist discourse goes beyond only depicting the natural environment in its entirety. The narrative dives into the investigation of the idea of “Mother Earth” as a fundamental entity that offers sustenance, vitality, and a profound spiritual connection to its inhabitants. The prayers and rituals that widows execute, which are typically aimed towards the Yamuna River, are symbolic of a great spiritual connection with the earth. It is a sign that people have realised that the natural environment should not be considered merely a method of exploitation, but rather as a sentient creature that is worthy of admiration and deference.

The ecofeminist ideology of Shiva emphasises the inherent connection that exists between discrimination based on patriarchy and the destruction of the environment. According to this point of view, both problems are linked back to a common mindset that views nature primarily as a method of exploitation, rather than acknowledging the inherent value of nature and the fact that it is worthy of reverence. Goswami wrote *The Blue-necked God*, in which she beautifully exposes the

marginalisation of Vrindavan widows and how they are restricted to different widowhood rituals. To demonstrate Shiva's statement that patriarchal systems and the degradation of the environment are interconnected, the observation that there is a correlation between the marginalisation that widows go through and the pollution of the river serves to highlight the fact that there is a linkage between the two. The concept of maldevelopment articulated by Shiva finds a resemblance to Goswami's portrayal of the metamorphosis of Vrindavan from a renowned urban city into a congested and contaminated destination for religious pilgrims. The unregulated progression and advancement that have resulted in the decline of the river are reflective of the cultural dynamics that have marginalised women, hence confirming the interconnectedness between environmental degradation and gender inequality.

This selected work is consistent with Shiva's emphasis on the value of women's knowledge and traditional practices in fostering ecological balance. The great affinity that the widows have with the natural world, as well as their understanding of the patterns and sequences that it possesses, serves as a contrast to the exploitative practices that have led to the destruction of the ecosystem. They are a perfect example of Shiva's concept of an ecofeminist movement that is founded on traditional ecological knowledge because of their ability to persevere and find solace in the natural world.

The knowledge and practices of women, particularly those of indigenous cultures, are often deeply rooted in an understanding of the interconnectedness of all life. This traditional ecological wisdom offers a valuable counterpoint to the dominant Western worldview, which sees nature as a resource to be exploited. (Shiva 12)

Even when they are in a place that is supposed to be safe, like the river, they are always vulnerable, and the fact that they are aware of the men's potential for abuse highlights the reality that they are susceptible under any circumstances. This particular section from the book is an excellent illustration of the feelings of dread and helplessness that the widows share, "The widows huddled together; their eyes wide with fear. They knew these men, knew their mocking glances and lewd jokes. They knew their hands, rough and calloused, that had a way of straying" (Goswami 113).

In her argument, Shiva contends that the unrestrained influence of capitalism and patriarchal systems leads to maldevelopment, which in turn leads to the deterioration of the environment and the exploitation of groups that are marginalised. As the novel portrays it, the Yamuna River once admired for its purity and vitality, is now severely hampered by pollution and exploitation. This is another example of how the novel demonstrates this aspect. The widows themselves are individuals who have been adversely affected by a system that highlights financial gain at the price of the well-being of the environment and society. Their voices, which represent those who have been silenced and marginalised, highlight the link between the degradation of the environment and the injustices that are committed against individuals. We can justify this, “The river is our mother; she gives us life. But we have forgotten our responsibility towards her. We have polluted her waters and destroyed her banks. Now, she is dying” (Goswami 150).

Shiva highlights the value of women’s traditional knowledge and practices in establishing environment-friendly harmony. This is a reflection of the close connection that the widows have with the natural environment. They possess a profound understanding of the cycles that the river goes through, the delicate equilibrium that exists in existence, and the interconnection of all events.

The widows of Vrindavan, despite their marginalised status, have a profound understanding of the natural world. They know the rhythms of the river, the cycles of the seasons, and the delicate balance of life. Their knowledge and practices are a testament to the enduring wisdom of women. (Goswami 150)

This traditional ecological wisdom serves as a contrasting perspective to the exploitative practices that have caused the deterioration of the river and the marginalisation of the widows. “Women’s traditional knowledge is not just about the practicalities of everyday life; it is also a deep understanding of the natural world and its interconnectedness. This knowledge is essential for building a sustainable future” (Shiva 30).

Considering the challenges they are confronted with; the widows demonstrate a remarkable amount of resilience and independence. They discover comfort in the natural environment, and they

draw strength from the connections they have with the earth. According to Shiva, this is aligned with her advocacy for an ecofeminist movement that is founded on the traditional knowledge of women and their ability to reject and fight systems of oppression and exploitation. In the novel, the harsh words said by the priest prompt the widows to reflect on their position of powerlessness inside the hierarchy of the temple. The fact that they are left imprisoned in a cycle of forced performance and deprivation is brought to light by this action, which reveals the institutionalised character of the exploitation. “But the priest’s voice, sharp and cold, cut through their defiance. ‘Sing! You sing or you starve! This is the temple’s rule, the holy law!’” (Goswami 83) The interconnection of environmental and gender concerns is a reflection of the mistreatment that the Yamuna River and the widows in the novel are subjected to. The underlying patriarchal structures that are responsible for the perpetuation of both forms of oppression are brought to light by this. It can be justified by Shiva, “Patriarchal structures... view nature as a resource to be exploited and women as a cheap source of labour. This view is the root cause of both environmental degradation and gender inequality” (Shiva 12).

In the face of adversity, their unflinching support for one another exemplifies the spirit of solidarity that Shiva’s vision of an ecofeminist movement strives to promote. The rituals that they perform and their relationship to the Yamuna provide a look into development that is founded on ecological consciousness and community support. “The strength of women’s movements lies in their collective voice, their ability to build unity and solidarity across cultural and class divisions” (Shiva 178).

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Indira Goswami’s *The Blue-necked God* is a work of literature that exceeds the time and the place in which it was written. It provides a compelling ecofeminist narrative that has a significant connection to the issues that are occurring in the present day. Through her analysis of the plight of the widows of Vrindavan and their connection to the Yamuna River, Goswami sheds light on the adverse impacts of maldevelopment as well as the vital role that women play in fostering

ecological harmony by highlighting the link between the two. To accomplish this, it refers to Vandana Shiva's Ecofeminist approach. Her entire body of work serves as a timeless reminder of the interconnectedness of all life and the unending necessity of ecofeminist ideas in figuring out how to create a sustainable future for everyone. Her art functions as a reminder of both of these aspects. The views that ecofeminism is an essential component of the entire process are demonstrated by her work, which is a compelling exposition of principles.

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## **Eco-Aesthetics and Art's Response to Environmental Catastrophe**

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**Abstract:** The paper intertwines in a stimulating idea of how artistic expression can address the challenges of natural disasters. It focuses on creative expression and the urgent need for environmental awareness. Through blending creativity and critical reflection, artists engage with the importance of our ecological crisis, offering distinctive views and inspiring changes with their artistic works. Eco-aesthetics may uncover the pressing issues of our time and shape the discourse on environmental catastrophe through their enlightening journey of potential transformative art. The bond between man and nature is intricate and characterized by variety, encompassing interdependence and interaction. Humans rely on nature for essential resources such as food, water, and shelter while influencing the environment through their activities. The relationship focuses on the need for sustainable practices to ensure ecosystem preservation. The role of art in understanding landscape is profound as it serves as a crucial tool for interpreting and expressing the mutual relationship between man and nature. Artists use various art forms, such as painting, photography, and sculpture, to capture the essence of landscapes, conveying their physical attributes and emotional and cultural narratives. All these creative expressions encourage a deeper appreciation and understanding of landscapes and promote responsible engagement with nature. It also fosters critical reflections on nature, identity, and the impact of human activity on the environment. By facilitating a dialogue between art and ecology, eco-aesthetics encourages a reconceptualization of our values and actions and a more harmonious co-existence with the environment.

**Keywords:** Eco-Aesthetics, Environment, Art, Disaster, Man, Nature



This paper aims to explore the relationship between art and ecological awareness. It seeks to understand how artistic expressions can reflect, critique, and respond to the pressing environmental challenges society faces. Being engaged with the idea of sustainability, conservation, and the impact of human activity on the natural world, eco-aesthetics motivates artists to create artworks that provoke thought and inspire action. Furthermore, it focuses on the potential of art to develop a deeper emotional bond with the environment, thereby motivating individuals and communities to engage in meaningful initiatives for addressing ecological crises. Art becomes a powerful tool for raising awareness and advocating for change in the face of environmental degradation.

An inquiry into the existing literature concerning eco-aesthetics and the artistic responses to environmental catastrophes is exiguous. This exploration seeks to identify scholarly works that examine the intersection of ecological concerns and aesthetic expressions within art, particularly related to environmental crises. Artists provide valuable insights into their interpretations and responses to environmental degradation through various texts, contributing to a greater role of art in addressing crucial ecological issues. The methodology strongly emphasizes eco-aesthetics and profound artistic reactions to environmental disasters. It harnesses secondary sources and descriptive analysis, complemented by impactful references to the art and artists.

### **Introduction: Definition and the Impact of Eco-aesthetics on Society**

Eco-aesthetics refers to a philosophical discourse that explores the relationship between ecological concerns and aesthetic values, emphasizing the interconnectedness of nature and artistic expression. This concept has gained significant relevance in contemporary art as artists increasingly engage with environmental issues by using their artwork to raise awareness about ecological damage and promote sustainability. By integrating ecological themes into their creativity, artists ignore traditional notions of beauty and encourage viewers to rethink the relationship between man and nature. This approach stimulates a deeper understanding of the impact of human activities on the environment and makes eco-aesthetics a vital component of modern artistic discourse.

Artists often draw inspiration from nature through diverse artistic mediums such as painting, photography, and sculpture. Art is a powerful tool for developing awareness about climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss. Furthermore, the eco-friendly practices in creating art emphasize the importance of sustainability and encourage people to foster a harmonious relationship with the natural world, ultimately highlighting the potential of art.

The significance of artistic expression in addressing environmental disasters serves as a powerful medium for fostering emotional attachments to ecological issues. Visual arts, literature, and performing art, sculptors can evoke empathy and inspire action among audiences. Artistic endeavors easily transcend communication barriers and allow a profound engagement with the crises of the environment. “Art is not able to create the nation-wide or global change ultimately required, but it can stop us from halting or going backwards on our personal journey” (Phillips 55). Thus, the role of art in the context of environmental challenges is necessary to comprehend the seriousness of the situation and to foster a sense of optimism amid hardship.

The influence of eco-aesthetics on societal dynamics is profound, as it intertwines environmental consciousness with artistic expression, fostering a deeper appreciation for nature within communities. This emerging field of discourse encourages individuals to engage with their surroundings through a lens that values sustainability and ecological integrity. It promotes cultural narratives towards more environmentally responsible practices. The integration of aesthetic and ecological principles forms the foundation of eco-aesthetics, which serves to increase collective awareness of environmental issues. As a result, societies that embrace eco-aesthetic values may witness a transformation in their relationship with the natural world leading to more sustainable living and a stronger commitment to preserving ecological balance for future generations. Otherwise, “what hope is there for sustainability when conspicuous consumption holds all the cards for pleasure: self-realization, aesthetic transport, spiritual transcendence?” (Steiner 5).

### **Art Addressed Nature: Historical Context**

The historical context of art-related nature reveals a profound interplay between human experience and environmental turmoil. Artists have been seeking to capture the emotional and physical outcome of such calamities, often reflecting societal fears, resilience, and possible measures for prevention across different periods. The depictions of natural disasters in classical paintings and contemporary installation art address climate change and its consequences. “Ideas and attitudes might contribute to an ecologically aware relation between the human observer and the worlds which they observe” (Malcolm 4). Art has served as both a mirror and a realization of people’s vulnerability and adaptability. This artistic response captures the immediate effect of disasters and engages with larger themes of loss, recovery, and the ongoing relationship between nature and civilization, thereby enriching our comprehension of these events within a cultural framework.

Art dedicated to the environment is not a recent phenomenon. The origin of the environmental art movement can be traced back to the Industrial Revolution when there was an increasing level of air pollution due to carbon emissions from the industries on growth. Even before that time, we could argue that Environmental Art began with cave paintings in the Old Stone Age. Throughout art history, nature has consistently been a profound source of inspiration for artists. This influence can be found in wide-ranging art forms from the prehistoric cave paintings of the Upper Paleolithic to the landscapes of David Hockney. We also realized the importance of nature when poet William Wordsworth referred to the lake districts as a “sort of national property in which every man has a right and interest who has an eye to perceive and a heart to enjoy” (Wordsworth 88).

The natural environment was a primary source of inspiration for the Art Nouveau movement, which flourished from the early 1890s until the onset of the First World War. Artists associated with Art Nouveau were inspired by plant forms and nature. They took organic subjects and flattened and abstracted them into sophisticated, sinuous, and flowing motifs.

Naturalism in art refers to depicting nature as realistically as possible. This approach emphasizes realism and faithfulness to life. Instead of incorporating supernatural or spiritual

elements, naturalism focuses on aspects governed by natural laws. Naturalism also refers to a specific artistic and literary movement that originated in the 19th century, beyond the belief that everything can be understood through nature.

The Enlightenment in Europe, which lasted from the Glorious Revolution in 1688 to the French Revolution of 1789, viewed nature as a subject of study and wild nature as a force to be controlled. John Locke, a prominent Enlightenment philosopher, believed that the state of nature was a condition in which humans, despite being independent and equal, respected the laws of nature. He contended that this state of nature was characterized by a harmonious existence.

The Enlightenment and Scientific Revolution significantly changed religious thought with the emergence of Deism which is an unorthodox religious attitude that refers to what can be called 'natural religion'. The belief in a creator is based on reason rather than supernatural doctrines. Currently, Environmental Art includes diverse scientific, social, and political areas and primarily addresses environmental issues and the movement also encompasses other topics related to climate change, emphasizing catastrophe.

The artists associated with the environmental movement frequently express concern about ecology, health, and human rights issues and dedicate their art to these subjects. Some connect themselves with conservation initiatives and green political agendas. The creators of environmental art help us understand nature, the ecosystems, and elements to be aware of, and raise awareness about the serious multi-faceted problems. Although Environmental Art sometimes refers to the ecology movement, it is important to mention that Eco-Art is a subcategory of environmental art.

Francis Bacon, a prominent English philosopher and statesman of the 16th Century believed that scientific knowledge would come from the careful observation of nature filtered through inductive reasoning. His philosophy of science was ground-breaking at a time when the most widely accepted authority on truth and knowledge of the universe was the Bible and the Church. "We cannot command nature except by obeying her" (Bacon 47).

In Greek mythology, Gaia is recognized as the goddess of the Earth and the progenitor of all living beings, akin to the Roman deity Terra Mater, or Mother Earth. *Maa Adishakti*, a divine mother is the goddess of nature. She has many forms and names, such as *Maa Tripura Sundari*, *Maa Kameshwari*, *Maa Parvati*, and many more.

In Chinese mythology, *Hou Tu* is the spirit of the earth, first worshipped in 113 BCE by Wudi, a Han-dynasty emperor. *Hou Tu* as sovereign earth became identified with the dual patron deity of the soil and harvest, *Sheji*, and so received sacrifices under this title. Pantheism is a philosophical and religious doctrine asserting that reality, the universe, and nature are identical to divinity or a supreme entity.

In theological discussions, nature is considered a form of general revelation. This means that nature reveals truths to us about God because He created it. His fingerprints are on it, and His character influenced what He made. However, nature is not as specific as the revelation God has given us through the Scriptures and Jesus.

Initially, many artists started painting focusing on nature as the central theme, but some painters are outstanding with their artworks on nature. Claude Monet, Salvador Dali, Vincent van Gogh, and Edouard Manet are excellent at creating nature on canvas. It was Claude Monet who drew attention at first to natural pollution through his paintings. “No decent human and natural environment can be created until the real sources of pollution have been eliminated, and the, ‘mental pollution’ of consumerism leads to general inaction” (Marcus 346). As London began modernizing in the nineteenth century, the city grew at a rapid speed and pollution began creeping up in all facets of life. Claude Monet, a leading figure of the Impressionist movement, first visited London in 1870 and painted various scenes of parks and the river Thames.

There is currently a movement known as the Green Movement with a multifaceted initiative that covers scientific, social, conservation, and political dimensions to address environmental concerns. “Incipient forms of culture and eco-art practices are part of a larger green imaginary” (Malcolm 174). This movement includes a variety of political parties, organizations, and individual

advocates functioning at international, national, and local scales. However, it is noteworthy that Vincent Van Gogh was once recognized as an artist associated with the color green. Hungarian-American conceptual artist Agnes Denes is often recognized as the grandmother of the early environmental art movement. She emerged during the 1960s and '70s and created many environment-inspired, site-specific pieces. Indian artist Sharbendu De's works have focused on climate change and human survival in the Anthropocene.

Eco-aesthetics transcends the rules of conventional aesthetics such as beauty, the sublime, and the religious adopting an interdisciplinary framework that connects the arts, humanities, and social sciences. This approach investigates the implications of aesthetics in the context of the 21st century. Currently, ecological aesthetics encompasses the exploration of beauty found in nature, including individual natural elements and broader ecosystems. Additionally, it involves the relationship between the aesthetic appreciation of good-looking landscapes and healthy ecology. Ecological art also addresses politics, culture, economics, ethics, and aesthetics as they impact the ecosystem conditions. Eco-art is guided by several principles, such as using natural materials that are sustainable and renewable. It strives to build a bond between artists and nature. It emphasizes reducing environmental impact by selecting materials and methods that are less detrimental to the planet. Contemporary artists are expanding their focus beyond traditional canvases, considering the lifecycle of their creations from inception to disposal. Environmental art often takes the form of installation. The term came into use in the late 1960s and it often closely relates to land art since then.

Examining these significant artworks reveals how different artists have responded to environmental crises, including climate change, natural disasters, and ecological imbalance. Through their compelling pieces, they express their interpretations and raise awareness about urgent environmental issues. These artworks have an emotional and psychological impact on viewers, influencing their feelings, thoughts, and overall mental state. The intricate relationship between art and audience perception evokes emotional responses, shapes personal narratives, and contributes to psychological well-being.

## Conclusion

The importance of eco aesthetics in tackling environmental issues cannot be ignored, as it offers a unique perspective that intertwines ecological awareness with aesthetic appreciation. It is the behaviour of individuals or groups in society which is willingly or unconsciously uncaring of the natural world and the consequences of individual or collective behaviour” (Phillips 68). By emphasizing the beauty, value, and essentiality of natural environments through artworks, eco aesthetics encourages consciousness among individuals and communities to engage in sustainable practices though it is thought that we are already in a post-sustainable world (Mentz 592) and “The death of environmentalism has already been proclaimed” (Shellenberger & Nordhaus 199). This approach highlights the intrinsic worth of nature and catalyzes environmental health. It also develops a holistic understanding of the interdependence between humans and nature. Eco-aesthetics addresses more effectively the current environmental issues and inspires a cultural shift towards valuing and preserving the natural world. It also inspires a collective commitment to preserving our planet for generations to come.

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## **A Study of Native American Resistance Rhetoric against Environmental Injustice**

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**Abstract:** This article explores how Native Americans or indigenous groups exploit different rhetoric to resist the environmental injustice and social exclusion imposed by neoliberalism. It aims to find out what kinds of resistance rhetoric the Native American environmental justice activists use, why they resist neoliberal advocacy of environmental justice, and how their resistance is reflected in the chosen text. Using “environmental justice discourse” within Ecocritical perspective, specifically based on Chrishandra Taylor’s and Stella M. Capek’s views on resistance rhetoric, it analyses Gerald Vizenor’s *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* (2008). This text reflects the indigenous people’s struggle against environmental hazards and social exclusion of the Native Americans caused by the neoliberal economic system of the US government. This study falls under the paradigm of hermeneutic research that exploits interpretive and argumentative modes. It uses the selected texts as primary and different scholars’ opinions expressed in scholarly journals as secondary data. Its finding suggests that the indigenous people, by resisting different forms of colonialism and imperialism, have contributed to environmental justice, the harmonic relationship between the biotic and abiotic world, and the welfare of entire species on earth. By introducing a fresh interpretive tool within academia, this study contributes to scholarly pursuits.

**Keywords:** Environmental Justice, Native American, Neoliberal Advocacy, Resistance

### **Introduction**

This paper explores and analyses how Native Americans and marginalized groups exploit specific rhetoric to resist environmental injustice and social exclusion. Using an Ecocritical perspective, it analyses *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* (2008) edited by Gerald Vizenor. Using the

insights specifically that of Chrishandra Taylor's and Stella M. Capek's views on resistance rhetoric it analyses Vizenor's text that executes a critique of neoliberalism and cultural imperialism.

The residents living in highly polluted areas, mainly the Native American environmental justice activists from minority communities, advocate environmental justice through different strategies like 'ethos,' 'pathos' and 'kairos' to counter-hegemonic power. Based on their dedication to conserving nature and their untiring struggle to restore their traditional right to the soil, this study argues that these people have tirelessly contributed since millennium to environmental justice. They have fought against oppression, social exclusion and injustice imposed by hegemonic powers. Environmental justice, as a discourse, cannot be complete by excluding their roles. These people consider that social or environmental problems are the result of social inequality and discrimination based on race, class or gender. The social hierarchy, as they suppose, results because of neoliberal economic system under democracy. They believe that the neoliberal policies provide enough space for private sectors, corporate houses and multinational companies to earn profits without any interruption. In this context, this study asserts that the Native people are the ones who, with their traditional knowledge and experience, have selflessly worked for a tuneful link with nature. The Indigenous calls for environmental justice are not only for distributional equity but for keeping their community culture intact and letting them continue to reproduce their traditional practices and cosmologies to perpetuate an age-long relationship with nature that binds these Native people with their ancestral soil.

The mainstream environmental activists stress resolving environmental problems without addressing socio-political factors. Their focus is on saving wilderness, wildlife, and a pristine natural environment. Their goal is to reconnect man with nature (Oricha et al. 2). However, they are indifferent towards the social and health-related problems faced by the minority communities. On the other hand, the Native Americans are struggling for their survival, the continuity of their traditions, and their ownership of the soil. Minority communities and people of color are more likely to experience instances of environmental discrimination when it comes to disposing of waste materials

and nuclear waste. This study explores how the advocates of environmental justice apply resistance rhetoric against all sorts of imperialism.

This study falls under hermeneutic research which employs interpretive and argumentative approaches. It uses the selected texts as primary data and different scholars' opinions expressed in scholarly journals are used as secondary data. It uses "environmental justice discourse" within the Ecocritical perspective as the interpretive tool. It analyses the representative texts based on Chrishandra Taylor's and Stella M. Capek's views on resistance rhetoric and Dorceta Taylor's social construction of environmental problems.

Geral Vizenor's *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* has got a number of scholars' attention. They have interpreted these texts differently. After reading *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* Navarre Scott Momaday mentions in his essay, "The Man Made of Words" (1997) how the Natives understand themselves. "We are what we imagine. Our very existence consists in our imagination of ourselves. Our best destiny is to imagine, at least, completely, who and what, and that we are" (30). Momaday understands the Native people's imagination as strength. Malea Powell finds that the Native writings lack a conscious rhetoric. She adds that the autobiographies of most indigenous writers are expressions of indigenous cultures in which the writers simply present particular objective reality that are rarely seen as consciously rhetorical (406). It is true that their writings are not equipped with conscious rhetoric, but still, they contain rich contents and their dedication to preserve their rights by preserving the soil.

George Steiner stresses on the need of preserving indigenous language for the preservation of environment and culture. He states ahead that each human culture, belief and language maps the world differently (xiv). He narrates that these "geographies of remembrance" (xiv) are connected to survivance struggle. Dell Hymes has talked about the need for linguistic interpretation of Native poetics of life. He argues that the heritage of American Indian poetry must be re-analysed and re-evaluated (36). Hymes seems to have felt the necessity of studying aborigine culture but his focus is on linguistic level alone. He does not talk about the Native people's role in preserving the entire

ecosystem. Scholars and critics of indigenous culture have focused their attention on Native people's marginalization, exploitation of natural resources from their ancestral land. However, the issue of how these minoritized groups' resistance rhetoric against different forms of injustice are yet to be explored. As there are very few significant integrated studies made on resistance rhetoric, this study fills this gap by paying adequate attention to the ways Native Americans and the marginalized groups use specific rhetoric to resist environmental injustice and social exclusion by unmasking the practical implication of neoliberal use of deceptive rhetoric.

*Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* describes that the Native people have struggled not only to survive but also to resist the colonial expansion and cultural imperialism under the face of neoliberalism. It depicts a strong sense of Native presence. The history of indigenous people has a pitiable story. Theirs is the story of harassment, enslavement, violence and erasure. Christopher Columbus, who discovered America for the first time, depicts the indigenous people of North America as ignorant creatures. He describes thus:

They appeared to me to be very poor people in all respects. They go completely naked, as the day they were born, even the women. All of whom I saw were young, not above thirty years of age, well made, with fine shapes and faces; their hair short, and coarse like that of a horse's tail... I showed them swords which they grasped by the blades, and cut themselves through ignorance. (Dunn et al. 67-69)

These lines express colonial authors' mindsets towards the Native people who were wild in the eyes of civilized explorers like Christopher. The colonial authors describe the history of the indigenous people as one in which the Native people are still in a barbarous state and commit acts of violence. The indigenous women are treated as commodities there. The picture below, portrays their wickedness and the state of barbarism.

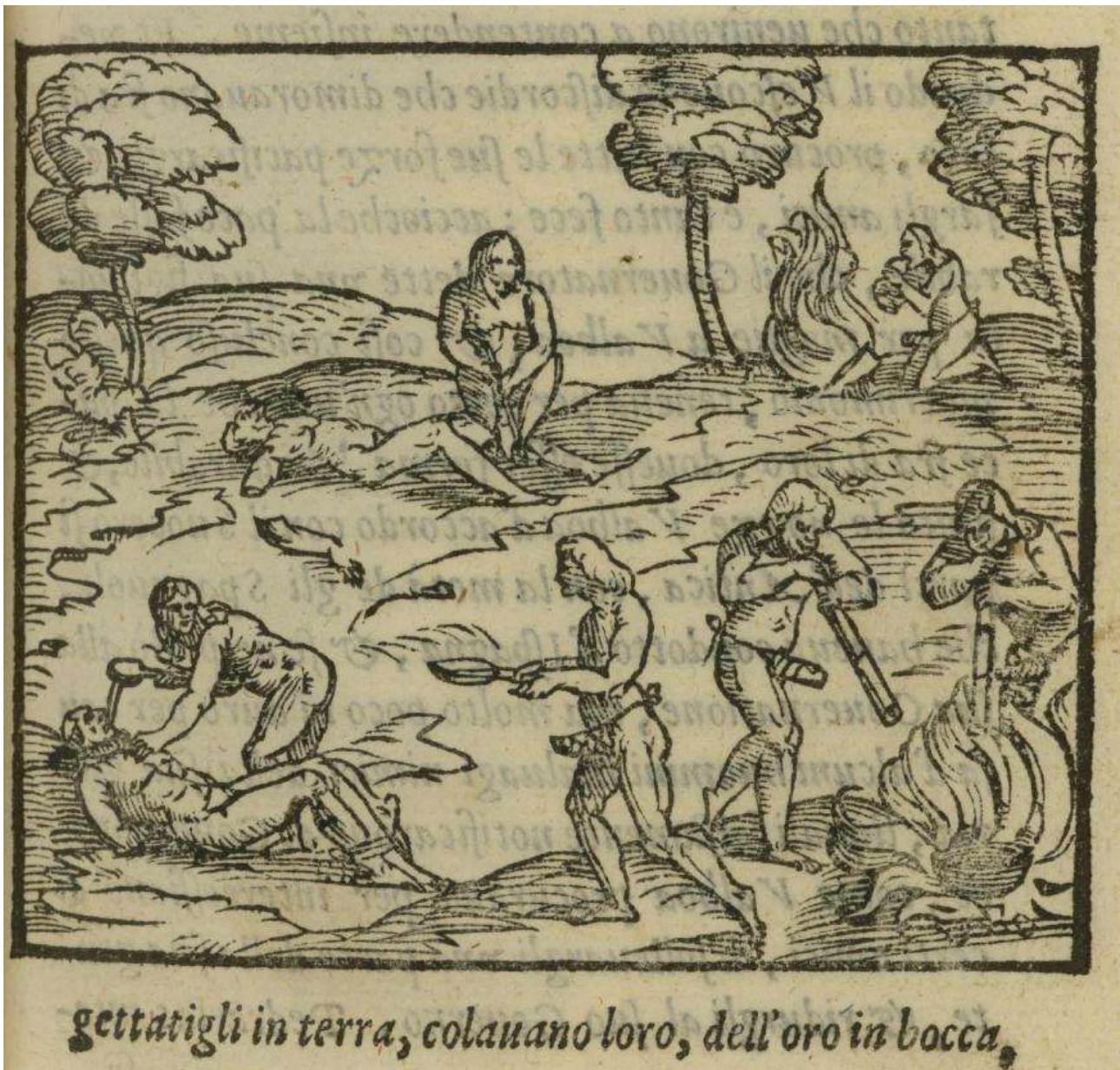


Figure 1 (Image sourced from John Carter Brown library)

In such state of colonial look towards the Native people, Vizenor's *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* sketches the Native people's struggle for survival as resistance for establishing their identity. The Native people resist all rhetorical tropes that describe them as subordinate. Defying the negative tropes, Vizenor uses the term 'survivance' as a rhetorical tool to resist and mark the Native presence. He explains it not merely as a reaction, or a survival story but as an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy and victim (Vizenor vii). Vizenor's view of survivance came against the genocidal attacks of the

Native Americans. Karl Kroeber, in this context, claims that Vizenor's work aims to repair a peculiarly vicious consequence of genocidal attacks on natives of the Americas: an inducing in them of their destroyer's view that they are mere survivors (25). The Native Americans have always been the victim of genocidal attacks. These attacks are not the stories of the past, but they are still going on. The Native Nations claim to have special rights to the land they have been living on for centuries, but they have not been able to hold ownership of their lands due to interferences from different quarters. They are the subjects of the US domination. The Native people have been oppressed by the dominant groups just because of their illiteracy, and inability to express even their pressing demands. Vizenor terms these oppressive attitudes the “Manifest Manners” and defines them as “the course of dominance, the racist notions and misnomers sustained in archives and lexicons as 'authentic' representations of Indian cultures” (vii). They are the representations and strategies of dominance over Native people.

The Native Americans have either participated in or mobilized different movements against environmental injustices. These economically marginalized always fight against environmental discrimination based on race, class and gender using different rhetorical tools. Chrishandra Taylor describes:

Minority residents living in highly polluted areas use the strategy of *kairos*, the appeals of *ethos* and *pathos* to reframe environmental discourse. Through *kairotic* moments, activists critically interrupt discourses which privilege inaction over community protests. They use ethical appeals to tie activism and political discourse into scientific and technical communication. Lastly, they use emotional appeals and image events to persuade audiences to recognize the injustice of environmental discrimination. (slide 6-8)

The minority communities deploy “environmental justice” as a tool to establish their right to their ancestral land. They frame and interpret the word ‘justice’ communicate the environmental burden to claim their recognition by using *ethos*, *pathos* and *Kairos*.

Grass-roots level groups generally have less access to political, legal, and scientific resources than do their opponents (Capek 7). When they claim their democratic rights, they often find themselves stigmatized for raising such issues. Their opponents, usually organized around groups such as the chamber of commerce, accuse anti-toxic activists as selfish NIMBY—Not in My Backyard (Capek 8). They are often characterized as hysterical and irrational or as greedy publicity-seekers. Exasperated by humiliating behaviours, as Capek further describes, the antitoxic activists gradually discover that there is no “polite” way to get their problems addressed (8). Their language rhetoric is therefore direct and it expresses their anger and inner dissatisfaction against the polluters. They protest the White elitists’ oppressive attitude using their own rhetorical strategies. They often use “ethos, pathos and kairos” as key rhetoric. Vizenor records different events that the Native people deploy to resist interferences. Among so many of such rhetoric, the use of ‘memory’ is one. Vizenor mentions a situation when a Native farmer vehemently opposed the court’s verdict when he was denied his claim to regulate manoomin rice plant as an age-long prerogative the Natives obtained. The Justice Lord had supported the earlier verdict made by the district Judge who had denied the Native farmer’s claim. The farmer had presented the name of John Squirrel, a dead man who had witnessed the government agent accepting the Native people’s prerogative to the land and crops, as evidence.

“John Squirrel is dead,” said the judge. “And you can't say what a dead man said.” Aubid turned brusquely in the witness chair, bothered by what the judge had said about John Squirrel. Aubid pointed at the legal books on the bench, and then in English, his second language, he shouted that those books contained the stories of dead white men. “Why should I believe what a white man says, when you don't believe John Squirrel?” (Vizenor 2-3)

Aubid’s expression of anger over the court’s decision to deny indigenous rights displays a severe objection to the imposing law that tries to weaken their rights. It is an appeal of both ‘ethos’ and ‘pathos’. Aubid’s resistance forces the court to think over the ethical side of whether forcing local farmers from producing their traditional rice plant is ethical. At the same time, their compelling stories

collect the judges' sympathy over their situation. They present their memories of the past about their millennial right to preserve their land, practices, traditions and wisdom. Though these oral narratives and memories are not the reliable evidences to secure their right to the soil, the minority people present these stuffs as their evidence. These are the 'pathos'—appeals of emotions.

Standing against the patent politics of India, Vandana Shiva stresses farmers' agricultural rights in the lines below:

Farmers' rights are an ecological, economic, cultural and political imperative. Without community rights, agricultural communities cannot protect agricultural biodiversity. This biodiversity is necessary not just for the ecological insurance of agriculture. Right to agricultural biodiversity is also an economic imperative because without it our farmers and our country will lose their freedom and options for survival. (85)

The Native farmers' resistance to the law inscribed by the Whites is both related to their survival and to the preservation of nature and biodiversity. Their stories are intuitive; their visual memories reflect a Native sense of presence and sources of evidence and survivance. Their Native names of different objects, animals, birds and entire phenomena are based on collective memories. They reflect the cultural absence and tragic victimry of Native American Indians in the United States.

Vizenor mentions another event of the use of 'pathos.' He recounts a moment when a Native humanist was captured and kept in a museum as the last Stone Ager. He was given a new name Ishi realizing a popular name would save him from telling his real name to the strangers. He was not a wild man like they described. He was a visionary, not a separatist, and his oral stories were assertions of liberty (5). The Natives carried out a policy of mockery and irony against the federal agents to understand the caged humanist. Humour and mockery are also forms of 'pathos.' The mockery of federal agents has always been a native theme in stories.

Minorities also use 'kairos', a rhetorical appeal of timeliness and opportunity. Literally it refers to the appropriateness of doing something for its effective applicability. It captures an appropriate situation for accomplishing a job. James Kinneavy and Catherine R. Ruskin define it as



timeliness, appropriateness, decorum, symmetry, balance-awareness of the rhetorical situation or “the circumstances that open moments of opportunity (131-142). Kairos takes advantage of a perfect moment of delivering a message. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech can be taken as an example of having kairotic effect as it had perfectly captured the moment to persuade people to support the civil rights movement which inspired the generations to understand the power of a non-violent revolution. Similarly, the environmental justice activists have always seized the perfect time to hit the polluters when their settlements suffered from the unidentified diseases. The US activists’ community based antitoxic protests in 1980s can be taken as example. The Native tribes are characterized as tribes with a wandering tradition. The Native people are always on the move and have always been defined fluidly. They are supposed to be unstatic. But Louis Owens (qtd. in Vizenor, *Survivance*, 221) in his *Dark River* (1999) explains the moving culture as a methodology of Native survivance and resistance (126). Their ability to adapt to a new space is tactical. Michel de Certeau regards that these people are able to disguise or transform themselves in order to survive. They can seize the moment and act accordingly. This is an example of ‘kairos’. The tactical mobility of the community conveys a message that it is strategic moves to resist and show their presence.

The Anishinaabegs, the tribal groups of North America, exploit metaphorical rhetoric to resist domination. The creation of animals and birds in their literature reveals a practice of survivance. They take help of verbal irony in their syntax and ambiguous situations of meaning to denote absence and presence. As the first Anishinaabeg historian William Warren notices that the Anishinaabeg are named in “several grand families or clans, each of which is known and perpetuated by a symbol of some bird, animal, fish or reptile” (34). The sand hill crane, a dancer bird with a red forehead and a distinctive wing beat loves to soar among the clouds, and its cry can be heard when flying above, beyond the orbit. Warren claimed that the Native Anishinaabegs are like the crane with totemic vision demonstrating the close relationship between humans, animals and the environment. The Anishinaabegs show their presence by such stories of birds and animals in their narratives. They use different metaphors to signal their opposition against the European invaders. An Anishinaabeg

member presents his vehement countering against the invaders thus, “I am a bird who rises from the earth, and flies far up, into the skies, out of human sight; but though not visible to the eye, my voice is heard from afar, and resounds over the earth,” said Keeshkemun. Englishman, “you have put out the fire of my French father. I became cold and needy, and you sought me not. Others have sought me. Yes, the Long Knives found me. He has placed his heart on my breast” (Vizenor 12).

Vizenor signals the genocidal attack over the aborigine people in the lines given above. Now the survivors are opposing metaphorically. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson assert that the metaphors are the important tools for trying to comprehend feelings, aesthetic experiences, moral practices, and spiritual awareness (193). These metaphors create a sense of presence which is the very character and practice of survivance. Anishinaabeg member makes use of ‘ethos’ to establish credibility and trust on him and to engage with his argument.

The Natives create a sense of presence by cultural reasoning. The critical interpretation of Native figuration is a theory of irony and survivance (Vizenor 13). Navarre Scott Momaday, for instance, introduces a landscape of bears and eagles in his writings. He points out that the names of animals, birds, objects, forms, features, and sounds have one definition in the eye, another in the hand. They are old and original in the mind, like the beat of rain on the river (3). The creation of such animals, bird and landscapes registers the Native presence and resistance.

The authors of literary texts from marginal communities sometimes seem to resist the dominant groups by a suicide killing too. This happens when a member finds no hope for a justifiable treatment on behalf of the authoritative power. This can be seen in Miguel Angel Austuria’s story “Iamericanos Todos!” (We are All Americans!). There, a Guatemalan tour guide Emilio Croner Jaramilo, called Milocho, is shocked by the invasion of Guatemala by foreign mercenaries in 1954 coup that displaced the democratically elected Arbenz government.

Milocho witnesses the bombing of the indigo and mestizo villages near the coast by American Airplanes. Milocho identifies himself with poor victims of his native country and particularly the indigoes who were once again being robbed of life, property, and cultural identity. As he was guiding

the American tourists from, his girlfriend Alarica Powell asked him about a volcano that destroyed the cities. His memory of the massacred Indians and his feeling of guilt for not having done anything to defend the country made him mad and he drove the bus killing all including him. (qtd. in Vizenor, *Survivance* 41) Milcho's state of mind reveals the way the oppressed class people resist the oppression by killing themselves. Miloch kills the enemy in himself (42). As far as the suicide killing is understood literally, it is cowardice to do so. A brave person faces each challenge that stands as an obstacle. However, Milcho's killing suicide should be understood figuratively. There is farsightedness in what he does. He hopes that his suicide killing would be understood as a form of resistance rather than a cowardice event. It is a resistant rhetoric against oppression.

The Native people make use of symbols as a form of resistance. Vizenor mentions how they reject all manifest manners that stereotype the Natives as wild. They deconstruct those destructive epistemologies that perpetuate trauma. They resist and subvert such embedded understanding through irony, wicked humour and language that refuses to render monologic meanings about the Natives. In an interview, Blaeser remarks that his writing is many things but "it is not a monologue," it is a dialogue in which the reader is compelled to take an active role (162). Eric Ganswoth glorifies the Native survivance through his painting "The Very Cold Moon." The last of the image accompanying the poetry of *Nickel Eclipse: Iroquois Moon* illuminates a huge moon. In its surface, there is Indian side of the early twentieth-century nickel that is cradled by antlers. The sharp points of the antlers scrape against the Indian head that is frozen emblem of vanished people.

The Natives of North America employ trickster stories as a form of resistance and survivance. The trickster is a symbolic image, a figurative trace of survivance. But it is not a tragic figure that suffers from domination or misadventure because of racial reason or monolithic tradition. It is a spirit that denies the obscure maneuvers of manifest manners. Trickster stories are still popular among Greeks to the North American aborigine. The Anishinaabeg still remember the 'Naanabozho,' a resistant figure who fights with the enemies trickily with a renewed sense of survivance. Alan Velle declares these enemies are historians, journalists, public intellectuals, and others who influence

cultural attitudes, both on the right and the left (qtd. in Vizenor, *Survivance*, 147). Vizenor objects to the way the Natives are portrayed as victims. He uses sticks to beat them back. He asks tribal people to discover their identity in their own tribal tradition. The trickster told the story as a means of defense. The framing of stories is a form of survivance and resistance as did Primo Levi who survived even under the malignant helicopter attack of Nazi Germany to write his memoir *Survival in Auschwitz* (1947).

### **The Natives and Their Ties with Nature**

The Native people's attachment to biodiversity is so intricate that they know each species and the cycles of life. They form stories of their attachments with them. So, Native stories are the sources of survivance, the comprehension and empathy of natural reason, tragic wisdom, and the provenance of new literary studies. Vizenor writes:

Native stories of survivance are prompted by natural reason, by a consciousness and sense of incontestable presence that arises from experiences in the natural world...Survivance, however is not a mere romance of nature, not the overnight pleasures of pristine simulations, or the obscure notions of transcendence and signatures of nature in museums. Survivance is character by natural reason, not by monotheistic creation stories and dominance of nature. (9)

The presence of animals, birds, and other creatures in the Native literature is a fundamental commitment of the aborigine people to preserve nature for the sake of perpetuating harmonious relationship between biotic and non-human world.

The Indigenous people have always been the victim of neoliberalism. Neoliberal policies have brought social, political, cultural, economic, and environmental challenges for indigenous peoples in the region. Indigenous communities and movements, in response, have resisted neoliberal projects together with their struggle for seeking recognition as peoples, rights for equal participation in the policy making level, redistribution of environmental benefits or harms, and recovery of ancestral territories. At the same time, the struggles of the indigenous people are both to ensure their right to

live, continue to practice their ancestral wisdom, traditions and ways of life by preserving nature and the entire species.

On the basis of a thorough examination of *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* by Gerald Vizenor, this study has revealed that the grass-roots-level environmental activists have either participated in or created and led different movements against environmental injustice. Their networks have influenced the national economy and the state policy as well. These economically marginalized activists use different rhetorical frames for social justice and equal distribution of power. They always fight against environmental discrimination based on race, class and gender using different rhetorical tools. These tools range from oral stories to the most advanced forms of protest. They exploit 'justice' as a strategy to fight against all sorts of discriminations. The aborigine people basically exploit 'kairos' to claim the rationalities of their struggle against hegemonic power. These people's struggle against neoliberal agendas are linked to their right to survive, continue to produce and reproduce their age long wisdom, traditions, cultures and ways of life in harmonious relationship with the nature, species and the entire non-living world.

## **Conclusion**

After a close analysis of Vizenor's text, I have claimed that the Native Americans have deep connection with the land. Their cultural life styles, practices and survivals are connected with ecological preservation. Their traditional knowledge of medicinal plants, foods, forest and animals are uniquely helpful to establish the intricate relationship between flora and fauna. Their creation stories, culture, and way of life have contributed to restore the original ecosystem. They always endeavoured to mitigate environmental problems by protecting their traditional culture. Global market economy, privatization and liberal democracy have become great obstacles to their survival and ecological preservation. This study has argued that Native Americans have severely suffered from different forms of invasions and imperialism. They have gone through hard times for their survival and for establishing their age-long right to the soil. However, they have not given hope. They have struggled a lot to resist all these invasions. They employ different rhetorical strategies like direct

actions, legal actions, and community campaigns to do so. Their struggles to continue the age-long way of life are not only related to the existence of their tribes, they also ensure a sound relationship of human beings with the nonhuman world.

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## **The Self and the Sea: A Symbiosis of Literature and Seascape in J.M. Synge's *Riders to the Sea***

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### **Abstract:**

... But men must work, and women must weep,  
Though storms be sudden, and waters deep, ...

Charles Kingsley, *The Three Fishers*

The iconic synthesis of literature and seascape manifests well in J.M. Synge's play *Riders to the Sea*. The playwright brilliantly depicts the sea as the retainer of the Aran Islanders and simultaneously the devastator within the scope of a single act. The poetic fervour of the play infuses a deep sense of urgency in the inhabitants of Aran, who strive to survive within the destructive folds of the Atlantic. The synthesis of time and space and crisis of the content adds beauty and a rare element of drama to this poetic composition of the Irish playwright. The rhythm of the sea that conditions the lifestyle of the inhabitants and the endless efforts of these inhabitants to survive against all odds, create an amalgam of human life and natural environment.

This paper proposes to explore the need to harmonise human and environmental impulses to achieve a perfect balance in the symbiotic relationship between the two. The surge of the sea contrasts with the calm fortitude of the matriarch figure, Maurya, in the play. Again, the vast, malevolent stretch of the sea contrasts the restless energy of Bartley. Therefore, it seems that Synge has compared and contrasted his characters to the changing shades of the sea. Hence, in *Rider to the Sea*, the Riders and the Sea co-exist, contrast, and complement one another as two equal but alternative principles in the dramatic spectrum created by Synge.

**Keywords:** Riders, Sea, Devastator, Synthesis, Symbiotic, Fortitude, Matriarch, Malevolent, Spectrum



It is opined that the Sea and not the Gods are the source of the law in this play. To go by this belief, one can confirm that the Sea in *Riders to the Sea* is the all-pervasive presence that conditions and influences every movement of this dramatic tragedy. So, the topography of the land on Aran Islands, and the human lives who inhabit it and the daily circumstances of their lives are all made subordinate to the vast and swarthy expanse of the Sea. The Sea controls not just the physical dynamics but also the psychological and emotional contours of the people who struggle for survival against the elaborate panorama of Aran Islands. In his essay titled, “The Balance or Reconciliation of Opposite and Discordant Qualities”, I. A. Richards expresses, “It is essential to recognize that in a full tragic experience there is no suppression. The mind does not shy away from anything, it does not protect itself with any illusion, it stands uncomforted, unintimidated, alone and self-reliant”. (Draper 145) In *Riders to the Sea* the connect between Maurya and the Sea reflects this notion as they both stand ‘unintimidated’, ‘alone’ and ‘self-reliant’. The Sea commands both time and space in Synge’s play. While on the one hand life on Aran Islands is dominated by the movement of the ‘Riders’ to the Sea in search of sustenance, on the other, the concept of space is dominated by the surging Sea which beckons the ‘Riders’ to its depths. The Sea is the dominant presence which embraces and forsakes human lives at Will. In this context, therefore, the Sea can be analysed as the Immanent Will, which nurtures and destroys and is the sole entity in the play which creates that connect between the various other entities of the play and help them proceed towards their respective ends. So, this absolute control of Time and Space is this gyre which the Sea dominates creates a gap within which the human characters vent their emotions and continue with their frugal living despite their persistent resistance against all odds. The odds appear in their daily struggle for survival. They create an abyss in the lives which connects them to the Sea as the Sea appears to open that abyss even wider to consume all that is within and without its periphery on Aran islands.

To quote Raymond Williams from his essay, “Tragedy and Contemporary Ideas”, “Human death is often the form of the deepest meanings of a culture. When we see death, it is natural that we should draw together—in grief, in memory, in the social duties of burial – our sense of the values of

living, as individuals and as a society. But then, in some cultures or in their breakdown, life is regularly read back from the fact of death, which can seem not only the focus but also the source of our values. Death, then, is absolute, and all our living simply relative. Death is necessary, and all other human ends are contingent”. (Draper 187) To go by this reading and analysis, the Sea appears as the omnipotent and omnipresent, encompassing the topography of the islands and its hapless inhabitants. However, the research question continues to arise—are these humans actually helpless? Do they surrender to the call of the Sea, or do they override its diktat? Among all the characters who respond to the challenges of the Sea in the past and present, the character of the quintessential matriarch, Maurya, stands out. Maurya, the dowager, the mother who has lost all to the Sea, claims: “...There’s nothing more the Sea can do to me now” (Synge 13). There is a quiet strength latent in this statement. A statement which defies all possible means of negotiations with the Sea. Instead, she stands as a counter-principle to the swarthy monotony of the Sea. Maurya’s restless unease counters the surges of the Sea. The power that entails within her and the strength that she embodies are incomparable to ordinary human capacities and can solely be paralleled to the inordinate strength of the Sea. Hence, we can surmise that the Sea has met its match in Maurya. The more it inflicts pain on this mother the more she reverts with resistance and an unmatched fortitude that refuses to be overpowered by the Sea.

This challenge that Maurya deals with in the play works itself out within the subtext of the dramatic action of the play. It really is a matter of great conjecture that the Sea gains preponderance over the human characters in the play. Indeed, Maurya’s sons are lost to the Sea and Bartley, her youngest and last surviving son is on his way towards abject surrender. Despite this, Maurya resists, survives and sublimates. About this phenomenon, I. A. Richards comments, “Suppressions and sublimations alike are devices by which we endeavour to avoid issues which might bewilder us. The essence of tragedy is that it forces us to live for a moment without them”. (Draper 145) In this moment of extreme suspension, Maurya escalates above the Sea. Of all the major icons of the play, the most poignant is perhaps that of the Pieta, the image of the sorrowing Mary mourning her dead son, an

icon so insistent and iterative as almost to create something of a subgenre in Modern Tragedy. Critic Raymond Williams asserts, “In *Riders to the Sea*, the people are simply victims; the acceptance is not whole, but rather a weary resignation” (Ayling 82). It is indeed easy to see Maurya’s suffering as a form of passive acceptance. Still, when one probes the trajectory of her loss, it can be studied as a mother’s relentless fight to keep alive her identity as a mother to her sons. Hence, this is a form of self-preservation which Maurya attempts and succeeds in maintaining in her saga of struggle with the Sea. This concept, that Maurya evolves as a more powerful entity than the malevolent Sea is an attempt to help the readers comprehend the counterforce that Maurya exerts on the Sea.

In this connection, we can explore the ‘Resilience Theory’ as propounded by Norman Garnezy, who defines resilience as, “Not necessarily impervious to stress. Rather, resilience is designed to reflect the capacity for recovery...” (Shean 8) Therefore, this theory claims that it is not the nature of adversity that is most important; it is how we deal with it. This concept can be directly related to the dramatic situation of *Riders to the Sea*. In a desperate attempt to override the suprahuman powers of the Sea, Maurya uses Resilience as a tool to channel her stoic acceptance of Fate. Maurya defines the theory of Resilience in the fortitude she displays from the start till the close of this tragedy.

In this play, water is identified with death, not with life or regeneration. Conversely, Maurya’s very presence as a mother figure in the play symbolises alternate symbols of life and regeneration. We witness a catastrophic collision between maternity and infertility. The Sea represents a barrenness through which it stifles life out of humanity on Aran. On the contrary, Maurya is the representation of fecundity which confers upon her the meaningful identity of her ‘self’ as a mother. Her motherhood is infused with strength, creating a condition in which she embodies the power of quintessential motherhood. Critic Errol Durbach comments, “What we find in Maurya, it seems to me, is the catastrophic collision between Maternity and Necessity; and, ultimately, a quiet recognition that these two opposing elements are in fact identical.” (Ayling 83) Out of this collision, what emanates is also

an intrinsic connection between the two. Synge transforms the play into an image of Necessity from the opening stage direction. Quite effortlessly he converts the local and the realistic images into visual metaphors of the universal and the metaphysical. Apart from the domestic symbols of nets, oilskins, and whiteboards, the spinning wheel throws up the shadows of Clotho, Lachesis and Atropos, as critic Donna Gerstenberger suggests, “quietly rise behind the figures of Synge’s fate-ridden women” (Ayling 78). To quote Errol Durbach, “As women, they embody, like the sea, the principle of fate, the rhythm of destiny, the cycle of birth and inevitable death, and although one of the women is rendered effete by the destruction of all her menfolk, two daughters remain to endure the eternal perpetuation of this cycle. Nets and wheels and boards are essential parts of the infernal machinery of the play; and it is in this sense, it seems to me, exist as ‘a natural link between the people and the world that is about them’” (Ayling 85).

Maurya’s stoicism lies in the querulous resistance she shows when she appears in the play. Her resistance to the Sea from the start confers meaning to her selfhood. The matriarch, the moirai, is the Madonna who remains unfazed in the face of inevitable catastrophes. The fact that Bartley rides despite every cautionary warning breathes life into the lines:

“But men must work, and women must weep,  
Though storms be sudden, and waters deep.”

(*The Three Fishers* by Charles Kingsley)

The entire play moves towards a ‘synthetic vision’ of existence in which images of life and death intermingle. The dead for instance, are clothed in new garments while the living wear the clothes of the dead. The pain of a mother’s loss of her sons quite naturally evokes the pain of bearing them, which Maurya refers to as ‘hard birth’. As Durbach comments, “As she speaks, the cynical pattern of faith begins to establish itself again, that sense of inexorable repetition in which the central ritual of the play is uttered and enacted simultaneously” (Ayling 88). For instance, the baby on her knee becomes the corpse on her table. And yet, the rituals of birth and death seem superimposed. When

Bartley's corpse is brought in, some primitive sacrificial ritual is evoked by 'the iconographical Pieta'. With the entry of Bartley's corpse with water dripping from a piece of red sail, Maurya experiences a sense of triumphant freedom. It is a process of acceptance arrived at, after nine days of keening. When Maurya says: "They are all together this time, and the end is come" (Synge 15), she is finally able to vent the words that had choked in her throat at the spring well. She is now able to confer the blessing of the 'Universal Mother' upon all her sons. All men are riders to the unappeasable sea; and to accept Maurya's blessing is to share in the tragic experience of the play that, "No man at all can be living forever and we must be satisfied" (Synge 15). Therefore, Durbach concludes, "Necessity make *Riders to the Sea* a perfectly conceived and exquisitely wrought tragedy of the sorrowing Mother and her fated sons." (Ayling 89)

The iconic synthesis of literature and seascape manifests well in J.M. Synge's play *Riders to the Sea*. The portrayal of the sea as the retainer of the Aran Islanders and simultaneously the devastator, is brilliantly depicted by the playwright within the scope of a single act. The poetic fervour of the play infuses a deep sense of urgency in the inhabitants of Aran who strive to survive within the destructive folds of the Atlantic. The synthesis of time and space and crisis of the content adds beauty and a rare element of drama to this poetic composition of the Irish playwright. The rhythm of the sea that conditions the lifestyle of the inhabitants and the endless efforts of these inhabitants to survive against all odds create an amalgam of human life and the natural environment.

In this play, Synge explores the need to harmonise human and environmental impulses to achieve a perfect balance between the two. The surge of the Sea contrasts the calm fortitude of the matriarch figure, Maurya in the play. Again, the vast, malevolent stretch of the Sea contrasts the restless energy of Bartley. Therefore, it seems, that Synge has compared his characters to the changing shades of the sea. Hence, in *Rider to the Sea*, the Riders and the Sea co-exist, contrast, and complement one another as two equal but alternative principles in the dramatic spectrum created by Synge.

The power of an external force impinging on the internal circuit is a motif that has been explored by Brecht in his play *Senora Carrar's Rifles*. The central figure of the play is that of a mother with a son whom she wishes to protect. The outside, impersonal force in this play is the War. In both the plays the sons die in action and the mothers are left behind surrounded by characters of a lesser level. This course of dramatic action indicates an indebtedness although Brecht did not follow Synge's spirit, he was influenced in many ways by *Riders to the Sea*. The departures in Synge's play are there in the characters of Cathleen and Nora who cannot accept as easily as Maurya as their husbands and sons in time will also ride down to the Sea. Hence, they have a lot left to lose unlike Maurya who experiences the saturation of loss and converts it into a stoic triumph. Critic Sydney Poger, analyses that "Synge's play is powerful tragedy because it comes out of the lives of the people whom it describes. It comes out of a long religious, cultural and linguistic tradition. While the presence of death is overpowering the beauty of ceremony and acceptance blend with it to create the play's texture. Its strength is also in its Aristotelian Cathartic sense. We suffer with Maurya, about whom the play revolves, and we sympathize with her relief as well as acknowledge the truth of her final declaration" (Ayling 96) about death as a universal reality. Critic Denis Johnston observes, "*Riders to the Sea* has a classical unity and a completeness that makes one aware of the fact that in a sense it has ended before it begins." (Ayling 74) The brevity of the dramatic action is indeed intriguing. It enables the dramatic critic to remain focussed upon the entire play length as the crisis contains the exposition, rising action, denouement and resolution within its dominant presence. The tragedy is Orestean in nature. No moral choice is offered to the characters. The Sea is the source of the law and there is no escape from it. The play is about the effects of this inevitable force upon the human lives on Aran, especially upon the central, rather pivotal figure of Maurya. Bartley's Irish preparation for his journey conceals this dilemma that is Orestean in nature. Orestes by the law of life is bound to avenge his father. But, by the law of life, he must not kill his mother. Likewise, Bartley must ride down to the Sea; if he meets his end, he and his mother will have to accept it as the inevitable. The play is read as an elegy. Had it been concerned as a tragedy, then the notion of death

would not seem expectable but a violation of the expected norm. as critic Robert Bechtold Heilman opines, “in the elegiac there is a sense of the hero as victim: hence its proper relation is to disaster rather than tragedy. One of Maurya’s lines is a key to all literature of disaster: “they’ve all gone now, and there isn’t anything else the sea can do to me”.” (Ayling 72) These words help Maurya consummate in strength. She evolves as a ‘whole’ person, without the inner divisions or clashing loyalties that mark meaningful human conflicts. The dominant effect is one of pathos, and its import is limited. This pathos must not be mistaken for tragic effect. That would belittle the understanding of the whole human role and the modes of human failure. It is not the story of the failure of human efforts against the seething wrath of the Sea. It is indeed a saga of human strength that clashes against the surges of the Sea despite certain disasters and the wrath of the seething ocean. The human lives which are lost to the Sea are not to be analysed as lives which fail to make a mark in the circle of life and death. Instead, they conquer the fear of death in their grit and determination to take life in its stride and plunge headlong into the depths of the Sea. *Riders to the Sea* expresses an integrated view of peasant life which Synge gained from his residence on the Aran Islands. As critic Sidney Poger points out, “This is a play, not of a single event, but of a continuous struggle” (Ayling 93). As a mother, Maurya tries her best to stop Bartley. She tries to take recourse in the words of the young priest, but he says that he would not take responsibility. So perhaps as a mother, Maurya draws every bit of resilience she could command to prevent Bartley’s departure. However, when she is faced with the certainty of his loss, she escalates from the level of the personal to the universal. This helps to transform her grief into pathos and her role as a mother into that of quintessential motherhood. Maurya’s strength of acceptance is contained within her persona as a mother to whom the Sea can do no more harm. The fact that she repeatedly asserts this idea, converts her pathos into her triumph. The void she is left with after Bartley’s departure and death is not an empty nothingness. Instead, it is filled with a need to rise to the challenge of the Sea at every step. It is argued that Synge is content to show us the pathos of his theme. Unlike as in Heijermans’ play, *The Good Hope*, Synge does not try to rouse any indignation. Instead, the fortitude lies in “So it is, and so it must be”. Critic Max

Beerbohm observes, “It is the tone of the mother herself, whose acquiescence is deeper than the acquiescence of the mother in *The Good Hope*. She submits not merely because it was vain to rebel. To rebel is not in her nature. She has the deep fatalism of her race; and for her the things that actually happen, for evil as for good, are blurred through the dreams that are within her...” (Ayling 60).

While in conversation with Synge, James Joyce had once commented about the play that, “it was too brief to sustain the tragic mood. You cannot have a tragedy in a play that lasts for twenty minutes” (Ayling 61). However, despite the brevity of its dramatic action, there is an in-depth sense of temporality to the play which prolongs the tragic experience of *Riders to the Sea*. The audience is drawn inexorably towards the climax when the curtain is lifted. W. B. Yeats himself had commented, “...I remember saying once to Synge that though it seemed to me that a conventional descriptive passage encumbered the action at the moment of crisis, I liked the *Shadow of the Glen* better than *Riders to the Sea*, that seemed for all the nobility of its end, its mood of Greek tragedy, too passive in suffering...” (Ayling 59). The argument of the modernist mind is that this passivity is a consummation of strength. In this context we note that in Yeats’ play, composed in collaboration with Lady Gregory, *Cathleen in Houlihan*, the nationalistic idea of sacrificing young lives for the sake of their motherland, Ireland, is pronouncedly expressed. Therefore, it is argued that the play denies the finality of death. This is perfectly in keeping with Maurya’s claims in *Riders to the Sea* that death triumphs over the Sea in a universal context. The ritualistic practise of keening performed by the Irish women is yet again a ritual of acceptance. Maurya keens and thereby plunges into the process of first acceptance and then defiance of death. Critic T. R Henn has cited Dunbar’s ‘Lament for the Makaris’:

“Since for the Death remeid is none,

Best is that we for Death dispone

After our death that live may we:

*Timor Mortis conturbat me.*” (Ayling 67)



Likewise, Maurya triumphs through her acceptance, T. R. Henn observes, “For death and the Sea take all; but the Sea takes the young before their time, so that it acquires a new and hostile dimension, an auxiliary of Death. In it there are constant ironic reversals. Maurya takes Michael’s stick, lest she should ‘slip on the big stones’” (Ayling 67). This is a process of Inversion that Synge uses in his play. The young die and in their death, the old feel empowered. After Bartley’s death, Maurya and her daughters are not rendered helpless. Instead, they brace themselves to continue. The end is a benediction; thankfulness for the ‘white boards’ that will make Bartley’s coffin.

In the amalgam of the living and the dead, Maurya attains the stature of a priestess, blessing “...the soul of everyone is left living in the world” (Synge 15). Maurya’s cottage transforms into the microcosm of the world and by escalation the microcosm. ‘All men’ who are living is blessed by this mother who had had a ‘hard birth’ and who is the root and source of all life on this earth. The note of resignation with which the play ends does not benumb all with pain but ignite the valour to continue despite the primordial presence of the Sea.

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## Echoes of Transcendentalism: Role of Nature in Gloria Whelan's *Fruitlands*

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**Abstract:** This paper aims to explore the intricate relationship between nature and humans in Gloria Whelan's *Fruitlands: Louisa May Alcott Made Perfect* (2002). Echoing the themes of Transcendentalism, the narrative vividly portrays the lives of individuals aspiring to an idealistic existence in harmony with nature. The portrayal of the debatably unbelievable but real utopian commune 'Fruitlands' demonstrates how the natural environment influences the lives and literary development of its inhabitants, particularly young Louisa May Alcott. The characters' struggle to live off the land, practising agrarianism, vegetarianism, and rejecting materialism underscores their efforts to connect more deeply with nature. This transformative journey reshapes their personal traits and literary sensibilities. The well-integrated depiction of environmental surroundings and philosophical discussions offers a critical lens through which we observe the characters' deep connection to the natural world. This paper will also contextualise the novel within the tradition of environmental literature and transcendental movement, set against the backdrop of rapid industrialisation in the 19th-century America. By examining the fictionalised account of Amos Bronson Alcott's attempt to establish a utopian commune in New England, the paper will contribute to understanding how literature reflects and is shaped by the natural environment. A close examination of Louisa May Alcott's experiences in her father's utopian commune and her later literary achievement will be undertaken.

**Keywords:** Environment, Fruitland, Nature, Transcendentalism

### Introduction

The relationship between humans and nature has long been a central theme in literature across the globe, dating back to ancient works like the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. Writers and critics in America in the 19<sup>th</sup> century increasingly sought to explore the spiritual and philosophical connections between

human existence and the natural world. Gloria Whelan's *Fruitlands: Louisa May Alcott Made Perfect* (2002) offers a fictionalised account of a real-life utopian commune experiment led by Amos Bronson Alcott, one of the prominent figures of the American Transcendentalist movement. The novel delves into the complexities of struggling for an ideal life in harmony with nature, foregrounding the challenges posed by both human limitations and the natural environment. Cheryll Glotfelty believes that "the absence of environment perspective in literary studies suggests the work done in the field remains isolated from the real world outside academia" (xv) since it fails to address the environmental crises and the stress on the earth's life support systems. And it may prevent the people from being aware of the environmental crises. Bronson Alcott's utopian commune, as referred to in the novel, had the aim of creating a self-sufficient, spiritually pure community in the wilderness of the nature away from the hustle and bustle of the industrialised locale. Despite its high ideals, the commune failed, leading to its collapse due to the harshness of nature and human achievement limitations. Lawrence Buell's concept of "New World Dreams and Environmental Actualities" clarifies and reflects on the causes of the collapse of Alcott's commune as "some imported enterprises prove more adaptable than others" (56). This paper attempts to read *Fruitlands* in connection with Ralph Waldo Emerson's belief in self-reliance and the interconnectedness of humanity and the natural world. Much like to Henry David Thoreau's stay at Walden Pond, the commune in the novel struggled to live in close communion with nature. Louisa May Alcott, a young girl who narrates and comments on the lofty ideals in *Fruitlands*, exhibits her budding awareness of the world around her, hinting at her later literary talents. She repeatedly mentions Emerson and Thoreau to criticise the "hypercivilized effeteness" (Buell 54) of 19th-century America, probably to echo their voices. Thus, the paper uniquely displays the connections between humans and the natural world through the lens of Transcendentalist philosophy.

Gloria Whelan's *Fruitlands: Louisa May Alcott Made Perfect* is a novella that offers a fictionalised account of the utopian commune 'Fruitlands' envisioned and led by Bronson Alcott. The story explores how the rigid ideals of Bronson Alcott and Mr. Lane shape life in the commune and

its impact on young Louisa May Alcott. Louisa, portrayed as a lively and inquisitive girl, navigates the difficulties of living in the harshness of nature and the strict environment, sometimes showing insensitivity to others' feelings. The tension between her inner aspirations and external expectations is reflected in her decision to keep two diaries: private and public. The novella is praised for its meticulous historical details and philosophical themes, which add depth to the engaging narrative. It is viewed as a balanced work of historical fiction, artistically presenting complex themes in an accessible manner. The portrayal of the people at or around 'Fruitlands', along with their excitement and challenges, is vivid and engaging.

In her review of the book *Fruitlands: The Alcott Family and Their Search for Utopia* by Richard Francis, Helen Epstein reflects on "what the Transcendentalist was thinking" (para.1) referring to their move to "farmhouse at Fruitlands" (para.1) – a utopian commune envisioned by Amos Bronson Alcott in the early 1840s. She notes that "Fruitlands was one of a number of political and religious utopian experiments in New England that fused Transcendentalist ideas with the writings of the Frenchman Charler Fourier and the English Robert Owen". Epstein also emphasizes the lasting impact of the commune on its inhabitants, particularly young Louisa, who "later mined some of the experience in her classic *Little Women*" (para. 7). The review highlights the transcendental themes and the influence that the stay at 'Fruitlands' had on its inhabitants.

Similarly, in her review of *Fruitlands: Louisa May Alcott Made Perfect*, Susan Bailey highlights the novella's imaginative reconstruction of Louisa's lost diary as she writes, "The premise of the book is based on Louisa's diary kept at 'Fruitlands'. . . Gloria Whelan maintains that Bronson destroyed much of it as he had also destroyed Anna's kept during that time" (para. 2). She has an opinion that Whelan masterfully presents the increasing tension as she writes, "The best part of this book was the 'slow burn:' the building desperation, not only of how the extended family would survive but Louisa's own desperation with herself and all the criticism she took from the adults" (para.9). She praises the novel for the imaginative reconstruction of the lost diary and mounting tension and desperation experienced by the young girl.

In the same way, the critic Thomas Blanding draws a comparison between the 'Fruitlands' and paradise, stating, "Thus, in early June, 1843, Bronson Alcott gathered his family about him and began the Pilgrim's Progress from Concord to Paradise" (5). His presentation of 'Fruitlands' as a 'misplaced' paradise shows the challenges associated with the utopian concept of land. He further mentions Alcott's ambitious ideals in establishing the utopian community. Alcott was sensitive to pollution of not only of land but also of mind, stating, "Alcott went to great lengths to avoid pollution of body and mind" (4). He never considered going beyond the utopian mindset and did not seriously consider the practical realities. Blanding notes that the 'Fruitlands' community, once established for an ideal utopia, was short-lived: "The demise of 'Fruitlands' began with its founding. Alcott failed to distinguish between spiritual ideals and physical practicalities" (6). He observes that the 'Fruitlands' community did not last long due to the disparity between physical aspects and spiritual ones.

Richard Francis similarly comments on the short-lived utopian life of the community, established on the ground of egalitarian principles and ethics: "The community, established in a small farmhouse overlooking the Nashua valley in central Massachusetts, lasted from June 1843 until the end of the year" (202). In spite of its root in idealistic values, the community did not survive even a single year. Their plan not to eat potatoes hint at their impracticality: "Fruitlanders accused the potato of failure to aspire, because it grew down- ward" (203). Francis highlights the community's failure to take idealism together with practicality, to acknowledge the practicality. He also focuses on the dual nature of Alcott between limitation on humans and immense potentiality:

Alcott's ideas had arrived at this point when he embarked for England. His dilemma was that on the one hand, in his role as America's number one idealist, he saw man as spirit casting aside circumstances en route to God; while on the other, as historian and social evolutionist of sorts, he couldn't help feeling that the human race was capable of achieving a worth- while destiny for itself on earth. (209)

Alcott's ambitious project of the 'Fruitlands' community shows the immense potentiality of humanity and the omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence of God. Though unsuccessful, this

experimentation of utopian life has left a good inspiration and initiation for transcendence. Jacqueline E. M. Latham notes, “This experiment in communal living lasted from 1838 to 1848 and was inspired by the ideals of the “sacred socialist” James Pierrepont Greaves and named after Bronson Alcott who visited it in 1842” (61). Despite its promising beginnings, the ecological commune of Fruitlands disappeared shortly.

The majority of people at first did not move to ‘Fruitlands’ to live there. Sterling F. Delano emphasises the diverse members of the community, stating, “The cast or characters is actually quite large—much larger than the thirteen or so people who eventually settled at ‘Fruitlands’ (eight of them Alcott and Lane family member)” (1492). The other members were “the English Transcendentalists—particularly James Pierrepont Greaves, William Oldham, Henry Gardner Wright, and of course Lane himself—who welcomed Alcott when he arrived on British shores in May” (1492). This diversity of people made ‘Fruitlands’ a wonderful and unique community.

Thus, the novel has received a range of responses, most of which focus on idea of moving to nature and living a pure life. Emerson highlights the interconnectedness between humans and nature by saying, “Philosophically considered, the universe is composed of Nature and the Soul. Strictly speaking, therefore, all that is separate from us, all which Philosophy distinguishes as the NOT ME, that is, both nature and art, all other men and my own body, must be ranked under this name, NATURE” (1-2). It aligns with the Transcendentalist belief, the inherent goodness of humans and nature, mainly through self-reliance. In line with the ideas discussed so far, this paper seeks to explore the following queries: What is the impact of the natural environment on the personal and literary development of the people? To what extent does the novella *Fruitlands* reflect the principles of Transcendentalism? And how does the narrative connect the ‘Fruitlands’ commune to environmental literature and transcendental movement, especially against the backdrop of rapid industrialisation of America in the 19<sup>th</sup> century? This discussion draws the readers’ attention to exploring how the novella embodies the philosophy of Transcendentalism and environmental literature.

### **Transcendentalism: A Theoretical Perspective**

Transcendentalism stresses the inherent goodness of humans and nature, calling for self-reliance, individualism, and the humans' spiritual connection with the natural world. Through the ideas of thinkers like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, Transcendentalism interrogated the prevailing materialism and conformity of society. It urged the people to search for and believe in individuality with an appeal to be in close association of nature. Emerson's essay *Nature* embodies the core principles of Transcendentalism, showing how nature serves as a channel to understanding the divine and the self. Exploring the profound and harmonious interconnectedness between humans and the natural world, Emerson portrays the "lover of nature" (4) as someone "whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other" (4) and "who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood" (4) letting them experience nature with a sense of awe and joy. Nature complements and supplements the joyful and sorrowful moments of life, as pointed out by Emerson: "Nature is a setting that fits equally well as a comic or a mourning piece" (4). Emerson's claim, "In the woods, we return to reason and faith," probably advocates Thoreau's choice to live at Walden Pond. Thoreau questioned and challenged the acts that his reasoning faculty deemed unjust, and he prepared himself for civil disobedience—whether it was with the issue of the American war with Mexico or slavery. In Gloria Whelan's *Fruitlands*, the Alcott family moves from their comfortable home in Concord to 'Fruitlands' for an idealistic experiment. Referring to the move of the family, accompanied by an Englishman, Mr. Lane and his son, the young girl narrates the journey, "This day we left Concord in the rain to travel by wagon the ten miles to our new home, which Father has named Fruitlands" (3). She clarifies the purpose of their move when she says, "Father and Mr. Lane are removing us from the imperfect world (4)," and "We are all going to be made perfect (3)." This shift hints at the commune's intense commitment to seek life based on Transcendentalist ideals of simplicity, self-reliance and a strong connection to nature. The move brings excitement and challenges to all the inhabitants of 'Fruitlands', and their stay perfectly works as a formative experience to shape Louisa May Alcott's later life and literary sensibilities.



### **Lofty Ideals versus Practicalities**

Gloria Whelan's *Fruitlands: Louisa May Alcott Made Perfect* exposes and explores the tension between lofty ideals and practical realities. The novel dives into an experiment of creating a utopian commune to shape a perfect society based on transcendental principles. Henry David Thoreau sets out some prerequisite conditions regarding the plausibility of creating a good society, stating, "I am convinced that if all men were to live as simply as I then did, thieving and robbery would be unknown. These take place only in communities where some have got more than is sufficient while others have not enough" (115). Through the eyes and mind of young Louisa, Whelan presents the intentions behind the commune as she says, "...we are to be a means of improving mankind. We will do nothing that might harm our brother animals. We will eat only fruit, vegetables, and grains. Because milk belongs to the cow and her calf, we will drink only water" (4). Louisa remains bold, innovative and inquisitive throughout the novel, particularly in her curiosity about the Shaker family. When she observes that "All the men live in one part of the house and all the women in another," she doubts: "... they live as married men and women usually do" (39). She questions her mother, "where Shaker babies would come from" (39). Through Louisa's eyes, Whelan presents excitement, a natural mode of life, lofty ideals, and the complexities of honouring these values. The novel displays a gap between the high-minded ideals and survival necessities.

Echoing transcendentalist principles, the narrative reflects on the strong claim made by Louisa's father, who reportedly says, "... each man should live his own life, not as others live theirs" (5). It is a freedom associated with the individuals themselves. They follow the impulses released from the heart, including self-reliance, a sense of communal living, and a profound tribute to nature. Clarifying the notion of "Self-reliance," particularly for Emerson, writes Regis Michaud, it is "a declaration of spiritual independence, a plea for religious autonomous independence, a plea for religious autonomy" (76). The declaration of spiritual autonomy concerning inner calling of nature is a primary tenet of transcendentalism.

The concept of individual freedom, echoing the spirit of ecological self, is materialised in the ‘Fruitlands’ community, where the interplay between humans and nature, including animals and plants enhances the health of all ecological selves based on environmental ethics. With regard to the well-being of all selves, the narrator observes, “By the fine example we all set at ‘Fruitlands’, we are to be a means of improving mankind. We will do nothing that might harm our brother animals. We will eat only fruit, vegetables, and grains. Because milk belongs to the cow and her calf, we will drink only water” (4). These views are idealistic if seen from an anthropocentric point of view. However, it is reasonable to argue that there is nothing wrong to live in communion with nature with due respect to the land and its beings. For the attainment of such state and mode of life, one must abandon the physical cum mundane world with greedy feelings. In this regard, with Emerson in reference, Regis Michaud further argues, “Transcendentalism is an excess of faith. We see in Nature Emerson's self-satisfied indifference to the problem of the existence of external reality which he dismisses offhand to turn to idealism as to a dogma” (79). Emerson’s take on transcendentalism is based on self-induced indifference to the external and its affairs.

The narrator is captivated by the willow tree, which “stands close to the river, and its overhanging branches form a curtain” (11). This sight of nature’s beauty - branches forming a curtain – brings her joy and resonates with her spirit. She feels that the development of her own self and the growth observed in nature are parallel, likening it to “the tree branches grooming its fur and twitching its whiskers” (11). This bond leads her to assert, “there is something in me that makes me want to hide away and just be by myself” (12). She desires to be a natural being like a tree where the leaf naturally comes.

Transcendentalist philosophy stresses ideals such as following the inner calling of heart, self-reliance, intellectual development in harmony with nature, and struggling for moral/ideal perfection. In *Fruitlands*, the narrator finds the community as a place for pure living, free from modern society’s corruption and disastrous outcomes. The voice is echoed in the attention given to the health of soil, as hinted at by the statement, “The men will plant clover and buckwheat to enrich the soil” (17). The

Fruitland dwellers are concerned with the health of the soil like the health of the body. Enriching soil through planting clover and buckwheat not only enrich the soil, but also it equally enhances the body and mind of inhabitants to maturity, intellectuality, and self-empowerment. In addition, the narrator mentions the teachings of Mr. Lane, one of the co-founders of the commune, who encourages selflessness: “Mr. Lane helped me to see that I am selfish, thinking little of others. I must be willing to do without so that my soul may be strengthened” (20). The soul is enriched if the mind is free from the selfish thoughts. Life is also meant for others. When one thinks less about own prosperity, the mind is creative and focused.

According to transcendental philosophy, the creative faculty of mind is not related to the collection of facts. It is related to a creative outpour of intellectual wisdom. The narrator reflects the idea, stating, “Father says that children are born with a great deal of knowledge. The job of the teacher is not to impart knowledge but to arouse the conscience” (42). The conscience is related to the intellectual journey that the children are born with, and these potential outputs should not be overshadowed by the collections either of facts or materials. In this regard, she remembers what her father says, “Father thinks it is shameful to work for wages, and he will not do it” (44). The founder of ‘Fruitlands’ is against the collection of money, akin to Thoreau’s idea that thieving and robbery: “take place only in communities where some have got more than is sufficient while others have not enough” (115). The narrator expresses her boundless happiness in being a part of ‘Fruitlands’ community, stating, “I am glad I am a part of ‘Fruitlands’. I am happy to take the rugs outside and beat out the sand and dirt. I feel like I am cleaning up the whole world” (47). Her joy in maintaining the land’s beauty reflects the idea of cleansing her soul, body, and the world around her.

Transcending the limitations imposed upon humans by social constraints offers a different experience of nature. Freedom does not simply mean being free from cultural restrictions; rather, it means living in harmony with nature. The experiences gained and shared in the company of nature are long-lasting and immortal. Such experiences create an awareness of humans’ interconnectedness with nature and ecological awareness. Furthermore, the narrator wakes up at night and ruminates, “I

listened to the screech owl and stood at the window looking out. There was a full moon, and I watched the bats dive for mosquitoes. I imagined myself cast out and living in a woods with nothing but owls and bats for company and was very sorry for myself which made me feel better” (71-72). In the full moonlight, the narrator watches owl, bats, and mosquitoes with a sense of regret to think humans as superior beings. Then, the narrator blurs the false constructed dichotomies between humans and others, aligning with the principles set by her father while creating the ‘Fruitlands’ community.

This perception of an inherent connection with nature aligns with the argument of literary scholar, Lawrence Buell. He asserts, “The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history” (7). Humanity is intrinsically connected to natural history, and humans are comparatively new members on the Earth. Drawing on Thoreau’s *Walden*, Buell argues that this relationship shows “a recognition of the delicacy of the complementary project to which *Walden* is committed: to turn nature to human uses, as a barometer of and stimulus to the speaker’s spiritual development” (123). The interplay between Nature and humans, when examined through an ecological lens, catalyses spiritual development. Thus, the narrator comments, “Self-denial is the road to eternal life” (29). The road to eternal life with spiritual vigor is attained, discarding physical comfort and pleasure, embracing self-denial and wandering alone without being lost.

## **Conclusion**

Written in the context of the rapid industrialisation of America, Gloria Whelan’s *Fruitlands* is a critique of the idea of establishing a utopian commune where the characters struggle to live off the land, practising agrarianism, vegetarianism, and rejecting materialism to connect more deeply with the nature. This paper has explored the tension between lofty ideals and practicality, demonstrating that while nature can be a source of profound delight and spiritual insight, it also has challenges that require adaptation. This paper has highlighted how the narrative reflects and critiques the transcendental philosophy. Discussing the capacity of human spirit to grow, the paper has also explored the limits of idealism in the harsh realities of nature. Thus, the paper has depicted

'Fruitlands' as a microcosm for the complex challenges of utopian movements, offering the limitations of idealism in both historical and contemporary contexts. Furthermore, this paper has initiated discussions how Louisa May Alcott's experiences at 'Fruitlands' contributed to her literary sensibilities and later works such as *Little Women*. Thus, this paper expects to open up a new avenue for readers to explore the challenges of preserving spiritual and environmental purity, both in literature and life, in an age of increasing industrialisation and consumerism.

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## **Shadows of the Biafran Sun: Exploring Environment Indigeneity and Spirituality in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun***

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**Abstract:** Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* is set during the Nigeria's Civil War (1967 -1970). The book delves into the characters' interactions with their surroundings, cultural background, and beliefs, all of which influence their fight for survival. Adichie effectively illustrates the complexity of Nigerian politics and the long-term effects of war on its people through the lives of Ugwu, Olanna, and Richard. The book delves into the ways in which the characters manage their interactions with their surroundings. The narrative looks into how the characters navigate their relationships with the environment. This paper will examine the dynamic links between environment, indigeneity, and spirituality. Furthermore, it will investigate indigenous peoples' resilience in the face of socio-political upheavals, emphasizing the significance of preserving cultural heritage in the midst of modernization. This paper further examines how Adichie's story dives into the complicated relationships between humans and the environment. It will also analyze the impact of environmental deterioration on indigenous communities through the characters Ugwu, Olanna, and Richard, emphasizing the intimate linkages between land and identity.

**Keywords:** Cultural Heritage, Colonialism, Environment, Identity, Nigeria

### **Introduction**

Nigeria gained independence from Britain in 1960. The 1967–1970 Nigerian Civil War, commonly known as the Biafran War, was defined by the catastrophic famine and ethnic bloodshed in Nigerian history. The war between the Nigerian government and the Republic of Biafra was caused by a secessionist movement in the eastern region that declared itself the Republic of Biafra, resulting in a violent conflict with the Nigerian government. This conflict had far-reaching consequences for

Nigeria's social, economic, and political systems, including major humanitarian problems and deep ethnic tensions. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a Nigerian writer born to an Igbo family. She portrays the Biafran historical living experience in *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006). The novel is written in four parts. Parts one and three take place in the early sixties. Parts two and four take place in the late sixties. Each chapter marks a change in the lives of characters. It shows how the two communities, two groups, and two cultures have a discrepancy with each other.

“I wrote this novel because I wanted to write about love and war, and in particular because I grew up in the shadow of Biafra,” says Adichie. The book’s title refers to the flag of an independent Biafra—a sun midway through rising. “Both my grandfathers were killed in the Nigeria-Biafra war, and I wanted to engage with that history in order to start a conversation about the war—which is still hardly discussed in Nigeria,” she says. “It is a personal issue—my father has tears in his eyes when he speaks of losing his father, my mother still cannot speak at length about losing her father in a refugee camp” (Admin).

The novel follows the course of the Nigerian-Biafran civil war through the experiences of the novel's characters, Olanna, Ugwu, Richard, Kainene, and Odenigbo, emphasizing their individual and collective struggles to maintain identity and cultural integrity during the war and societal transformation. According to Yumnam, Veronica and Sangeeta Laishram in “History and Truth: Revisiting the Past in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Half of a yellow Sun*,” Adichie emphasizes the necessity of Nigerians telling their own histories. Outsiders frequently fail to adequately express the lived experiences, but Adichie's integration of historical events in a fictional story provides a multi-layered understanding of the past. The purpose of this paper is to investigate how Adichie depicts these complicated relationships, as well as their impact on Nigerian identity and resilience during the civil war. This paper will assess how environmental changes, cultural heritage, and spiritual beliefs influence the characters' experiences and reactions to socio-political upheaval. Through the experiences of Ugwu, Olanna, and Richard, Adichie investigates the connection between landscapes, indigenusness, and spirituality, illuminating the complexity of Nigerian identity and resilience in the



midst of war. Adichie illustrates how environments, cultural heritage, and spiritual beliefs are intricately entwined in molding characters' identities through the usage of Ugwu connections to the land, Olanna's navigation of a shifting cultural and physical terrain, and Richard's search for cultural heritage.

The story opens in Nigeria in the early 1960s, a time of hope and promise. The novel's protagonist is Ugwu, an Igbo boy from a rural village who works as a houseboy for Odenigbo, a university professor. Through Ugwu's eyes, we see the enthusiasm and intellectual fervor that pervade Nigeria as it dreams of a bright future. "He had never seen anything like the streets that appeared after they went past the university gates, streets so smooth and tarred that he itched to lay his cheek down" (Adichie 3). Ugwu is introduced to the new environment when he arrives in the city after leaving his village. Ugwu's surprise at the contemporary urban scene as opposed to the rural village exemplifies the effects of environmental modernity. He detects a distinction between his current metropolis and his rural one. "They went past a sign ODIM STREET, and Ugwu mouthed streets whenever he saw an English word that was not too long" (Adichie 3). Even though his initial proficiency was modest, he also demonstrates his understanding of, and, interest in the English language. He was introduced to a foreign language and culture. This initiates Ugwu's encounter with the outside world. Readers are introduced to the political conversation taking place in Odenigbo home through Ugwu's eyes. Olanna is a stunning and intelligent lady who leaves her wealthy life in Lagos to be with Odenigbo. Their love story takes place against the backdrop of political turmoil as ethnic tensions increase and the nation is ripped apart. It clearly illustrates difficulties, tragedies, and personal development. Adichie's expertise in weaving personal stories with the larger context sheds insight on the difficulties of identity and politics. As Ugwu adjusts to his new life, he becomes an active participant in the intellectual debates rather than a passive observer. Meanwhile, the romantic relationships between Olanna and Odenigbo expand, revealing their intricacies. The plot then changes to Olanna's twin sister, Kainene, who manages her father's business. She was captivated by Richard, a modest Englishman who wants to publish a book about Nigeria. As love blooms between Kainene

and Richard, the protagonists overcome the hurdles of relationships and cultural expectations. The author skilfully shows the complexities of their relationships against the backdrop of the country's civil conflict. Simultaneously, Olanna and Odenigbo's relationship suffers its own set of obstacles. The political tensions rise, causing a rupture in their lives. The characters' lives in the novel are in a web of personal and political betrayals on a national scale.

### **Environment and Identity**

The term “environment” describes the social and physical settings in which the characters interact and exist. “The street looked strange, unfamiliar; the compound gate was broken, the metal flattened on the ground” (Adichie 147). The broken gates and devastated neighbourhood demonstrate how conflict affects the physical environment and the characters' daily existence. In the midst of conflict, characters negotiate their social and personal identities. We find out that Odenigbo and Olanna are not happy, that they were split up for a while, and that they now have a daughter named Baby. It triggers the start of an unsettling sequence of events that signal the start of a war. Adichie depicts the carnage and mayhem that accompanied the Nigerian Civil War. The characters are going through the chaos of combat. Olanna negotiates their sense of self. “I look like a proper Muslim woman, she joked” (Adichie 146). Olanna is demonstrating her awareness of and sensitivity to the cultural and religious norms around her by utilizing her scarf to blend in with her surroundings during a time of danger. She is the character who, despite her Western-influenced lifestyle and identity, has aligned her appearance with local conventions to protect her safety. Olanna's realistic attitude involves defending herself. She escapes to Nsukka by train and appears to be a lady carrying her daughter's severed head in a basket. Meanwhile, Richard witnesses Igbo civilians being murdered at the airport. Colonel Ojukwu, the Igbo leader, says that Southeast Nigeria will split to form the Republic of Biafra. All of the characters are overjoyed about this. Nsukka is evacuated, and Olanna, Odengibo, Ugwu, and the infant relocate to Abba and subsequently Umuahia city. The living conditions worsen as the battle continues and Biafra's food and money run short. Odendigo and Olanna marry, but there is an air strike during their reception. The plot returns to the early 1960s, prior to the war. Olanna travels

to London, while she is away, Mama visits Odendigbo and sleeps with Amala, which Olanna discovers when she returns home. She moves out and becomes quite depressed. After reconciliation, Olanna and Odendigbo decide to adopt Amala's kid, as their own girl whom Olanna refers to as "baby." The plot returns to the late 1960s. The situation in war-torn Biafra is deteriorating rapidly, with widespread famine and violence. Kainene discovers Olanna and her viewpoint and the sisters grow close once again. Finally, Biafrans surrender, and Nigeria is reunified. Olanna's family returns to Nsukka. Feghaboo, Charles Cliff highlights the contributions made by women in his piece "Adichie's *Half of Yellow Sun* and the Valorization of Womanhood," which also supports her feminist ideology. Adichie highlights the value of education and self-sufficiency for women. Characters with advanced degrees, such as Kainene and Olanna, highlight the changes that demonstrate how higher education is essential to attaining gender equality.

In the text, we witness Ugwu, the houseboy for Odendigbo "Ugwu stood by the door, waiting" (Adichie 5). Waiting for instructions in a new and unfamiliar area causes a shift in connections with family members owing to the conflict. Initially viewed as a servant, Ugwu's purpose changes as he becomes more incorporated into the family's inner circle. This mental transformation from wanting to die of pain and thirst to fear and doubt about death, occurs as she confronts his condition in the hospital. His experiences with violence and tragedy throughout the conflict also alter his perception of his value and identity. The war's impact on his own development and interactions with family members demonstrates how external conflicts can disrupt social dynamics and personal progress.

### **Historical and Cultural Context**

Postcolonial writers use history to reflect on their experiences and illuminate conflicts and violence, such as those observed in Nigeria. Ethnic conflicts between the Igbo, Hausa-Fulani, and Yoruba populations sparked the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970). The history of British colonization in Nigeria had a significant impact on the country's political and social institutions. The arbitrary borders imposed by colonial powers exacerbated ethnic differences, helping to spark the civil war. *Things*

*Fall Apart*, a novel by Chinua Achebe, graphically depicts the confrontation between traditional Igbo culture and Western ideas. It is said that the introduction of British colonialists to the Igbo community of Umuofia was a disruptive force that eventually changed the traditional Igbo society. While attempting to maintain their way of life in the face of foreign influences, characters fight against the changes imposed by colonial authority, highlighting the breakdown of traditions and social systems. *Half of the Yellow Sun* was a response to the Igbo people's political and economic marginalization. Political instability, economic inequality, and ethnic hostility, all these played significant roles. The Eastern region's bid to secede was motivated by a desire for greater autonomy and protection against alleged discrimination. The conflict caused enormous misery, notably hunger in Biafra, which was exacerbated by a blockade imposed by the Nigerian government. The battle resulted in a significant loss of life and had long-term consequences for Nigerian society.

As the civil war broke out, the lives of the characters were irreparably changed. Many central characters were from the Igbo tribe, and their stories emphasized the horrors of battle. The catastrophic condition in Biafra, characterized by food and supply shortages, was portrayed. Kainene was shown overseeing a refugee camp and witnessing the brutal reality of war, while she also forgives Olanna. Other characters like Ugwu, were compelled to join the army, where they participated in and witnessed several crimes. Some characters believed that Ugwu had died until he was discovered in a hospital. Odedigbo and Olanna returned to their hometown after the war, only to discover their home in ruins and several family members missing.

Nigeria, home to numerous ethnic groups including the Yoruba, Hausa-Fulani, and Igbo, each with their own languages, customs, and cultures, is a major theme in the book. We look at the complicated dynamics and conflicts between these. Featured prominently are the Igbo people, whose rich cultural legacy includes customs, traditions, and a strong sense of community. The narrative emphasizes the effects of the war on Igbo culture. For instance, Olanna's aversion to air strikes is depicted. Olanna jumped each time she heard the thunder. "She imagined another air raid, bombs rolling out of a plane and exploding in the compound before she, Odedigbo, the baby and Ugwu could

reach the bunker down the street” (Adichie 261). Locals, notably Odedigbo, built bunkers as a symbol of the extreme lengths people would go to in order to defend themselves against bombings and other attacks. The currency change is a reflection of the war's economic hardships. “When the Nigerians changed their currency and Radio Biafra hurriedly announced a new currency too, Olanna stood in the bank queue for hours, dodging flogging men and pushing women, until she exchanged their Nigerian money for the prettier Biafran pounds” (Adichie 261). The Biafran currency was introduced with the intention of establishing independence and financial stability. The war economy, which included delayed salary payments and economic hardships, had an impact on daily life and relationships. Financial instability has a cultural impact, as evidenced by the attempts to adapt to wartime economic situations. Olanna's contribution to Biafran flag education serves as an example of how education can promote nationalism: “Red was the blood of the siblings massacred in the North, black was for mourning them, green was for the prosperity Biafra would have, and finally, the half of a yellow sun stood for the glorious future” (Adichie 281). Olanna represented the changing traditional gender roles brought about by the war and fostered a sense of nationalism via education.

The novel depicts the Igbo people's cultural heritage and identity, which is strongly steeped in their native traditions and rituals. This link is powerfully depicted by the characters' profound attachment to their land, culture, and ancestral practices. The story emphasizes the significance of these cultural touchstones in strengthening communal relationships and celebrating Igbo ancestry, especially during the turbulence of Nigeria's Civil War. Nigeria has three primary ethnic groups: Hausa in the north, Yoruba in the southwest and Igbo in the southeast. The story explores Nigeria's unique cultural tapestry, which includes over 300 ethnic groups. Significant cultural differences exist within the Igbo community, for example, between Ugwu and Odedigbo. Despite their differences, Ugwu and Odedigbo negotiate their relationships and acclimate to one another, revealing a larger story of reconciliation and adaptation.

### **Indigeneity and Spirituality**

The novel's critique of colonial histories, which frequently suppress or neglect indigenous knowledge, is central to its plot. For example, Odedigbo questions the colonial school system's narrative by telling Ugwu, "They will teach you that a white man called Mungo Park discovered the River Niger. That is rubbish. Our people fished in the Niger long before Mungo Park's grandfather was born" (Adichie 11). This discourse emphasizes the dichotomy between conserving cultural identity and succumbing to external demands, as well as how colonial viewpoints frequently minimize indigenous contributions and expertise. The novel juxtaposes a person like Olanna, who comes from an upper-class family and has more financial stability than Odedigbo, who comes from a different socioeconomic background. Olanna's internal battle to reconcile her cultural identity with the dominant attitudes in her new environment is palpable. For example, she reflects on Professor Ezeka's pretentiousness and her own uncertainty about her surroundings, revealing her personal conflict between her cultural heritage and the expectations imposed by her new social circle. Adichie also challenges the remaining colonial mindsets that regard Nigerians as inferior. Her narrative stresses the depth of Igbo culture and history, as evidenced by the allusion to Igbo-Ukwu art, "Igbo-Ukwu art, about the native man who dug a well and discovered the bronze castings that may well be the first in Africa, dating back to the ninth century" (Adichie 62). This complex craftsmanship emphasizes the Igbo people's outstanding metallurgical abilities and cultural past, contradicting the colonial narrative, which frequently ignores or undervalues indigenous achievements. The novel painting of the yellow sun, "it was a painting of half of a yellow sun on a black background" (Adichie 174), represents the spirit and aspirations of the community. Even in terrible times, the yellow sun symbolizes hope and a longing for a better future. This motif connects with the characters' ongoing fight for positive change in the midst of the strife. Ugwu's reflection on a poem, "If the sun refuses to rise, we will make it rise" (Adichie 174), captures both his own spiritual path and the human spirit's ability to persevere in the face of difficulty. His interest in literature and the environment provides comfort and a clearer understanding of his experiences amid the upheaval. Overall, Adichie's novel

masterfully addresses the interplay of ethnic identity and personal perseverance, serving as a stunning monument to the richness and depth of the indigenous cultures.

### **Conclusion**

“I am Nigerian because a white man created Nigeria and gave me that identity. I am black because a white man constructed black to be as different as possible from his white. But I was Igbo before the white man came” (Adichie 20). The work eloquently depicts how the natural environment is a vital part of individuals’ lives, intertwined with their cultural and spiritual rituals. Before colonialism imposed a new identity, they were Igbo, profoundly rooted in country and traditions. It is critical to reclaim and preserve the pre-colonial ties to the land as well as indigenous customs. This reconnection emphasizes the significance of valuing indigenous identities and environmental links in the midst of past and present disturbances. The historical context deepens our grasp of real history by emphasizing the lessons it teaches. Though the story culminates in the midst of a great suffering, it does so with a ray of optimism. Adichie says that, while we may not be able to right all wrongs in our lifetimes, we can nonetheless learn from history and avoid repeating its mistakes. Her tale gives understanding, humanity, and a sense of beauty to past catastrophes, emphasizing the possibilities of healing and progress in the face of history’s scars. Adichie brings attention to the nature of people, in her book emphasizing the quietness that shrouds the true impact of conflicts and the silent struggles faced within this turbulent time. The different textures used in the writing alongside the tactile sensations and varied temperatures create an experience for the reader. The way the sentences flow adds to the overall impact of the writing. Adichie’s book is truly remarkable as it weaves together a concealed past with richly developed characters. Her voice is significant in discussions regarding Africa’s future and she plays a crucial role in advocating for these discussions, as a woman.

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