

Literature and Ecology: Promoting an Eco-Consciousness through Children Literature

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Abstract

The study scrutinises intermingled relations between children literature and some ecological issues. Such interwoven relationships would be highly recommended to encourage children to explore and identify themselves with nature from early ages to avoid facing an extreme experience later on. The research limits its scope to two novels Suzanne Collins' (1962) *The Hunger Games* trilogy (2003-2007) and William Golding's (1911-1993) *Lord of the Flies* (1954), and both novels have no direct connections with Ecology and the Eco-consciousness, yet it offers an insightful description about Man's experience with Nature. Moreover, it raises serious moral questions, raises awareness, heals wounds and suggests solutions for the problems that are both cultural and physical about man's interactions with nature. The study narrows its theoretical methodology to the thematic contents of literature rather than their form.

Nevertheless, theories of ecocriticism such as Serpil Oppermann's, Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm are to be mentioned due to their relevance to the main ideas mentioned in the research. The conclusion sums up that the environment is turned to be man's collective problem rather than a mere didactic issue. This problem is referred to not only as a problem of nature, but also as social, psychological, and cultural problem that negatively affect all components of the earth. It is about a broad perspective which includes human as well as nonhuman nature.

1. INTRODUCTION

Eco criticism offers the opportunity to delve deep into the relations between literature and environment, ecology, and culture by interpreting literary and cultural texts from an environmental perspective. In the collection of *The Eco criticism Reader*, Clotfelty explains that:

Eco criticism 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 readings of the texts. Eco criticism takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies. (Glotfelty, 1996, xviii)

Eco criticism is unique amongst contemporary literacy and cultural theories because of its close relationship with the science of ecology. Eco critics may not be qualified to contribute to debates about problems in ecology. However, they must nevertheless transgress disciplinary boundaries and develop their own 'ecological literacy' as far as possible' (Garrard, 2004:5). A scholar is supposed to have an idea about the importance of the theory of Eco criticism and why should we tackle narratives that are more eco-literate. It can be summarized in the following points; Climate change, Environmental degradation, Mass increase in human population, Rapid species loss, Survival (Hayden, 2017). Eco-criticism aims at bringing a new consciousness by changing people's perspective on nature. Instead of human-centered thinking, it is necessary to create a new environmental ethic and try to explain that even the smallest damage they cause to the environment is actually the damage they cause themselves (Sarıkaya, 2012: 99). In an essay titled *Ecocriticism in Children's Literature: An Analysis of Amit Garg's Two Tales*, Sandip Kumar Mishra explains that; "The present time is an age of Wi-Fi technology, during which people have little time to spare with nature. Gone are the days when children used to enjoy their childhood roaming through the green field, playing games with physical labor" and that "Ecocriticism gives emphasis on this eco-consciousness removing the ego-consciousness of man"

The development of Eco criticism has undergone three stages: Firstly, investigating how nature is represented in texts and exploring the stereotypes and absences in texts—secondly, recouping nature writing and recognizing the environmental conditions that may have shaped an author's life. Thirdly, developing theoretical approaches for Eco criticism by looking at the symbolic construction of species; how binaries of human and other are constructed in texts; how we might understand the hybrid spaces and cosmopolitan ironies of most lives; and the development of an ecological poetics that is attuned to interconnections, energy and flow.

Cultural ideologies presented to children about the environment clearly shape their cognitions, perceptions, attitudes, and behaviour towards the world. For this reason, it is necessary to establish images, texts, and ideologies in relation to nature and in a non-anthropocentric way through children's literature. The important thing is not to reflect what is popular through magazines, stories, and the media, but to convey pro-naturalistic thoughts to children as values. "The environmental literature that children acquire has the capacity to make profound, lasting effects that appeal to both emotions and intelligence" (Gaard, 2009, p. 328)

The earth is the only planet that combines humans and all living creatures in the Universe. This planet is remarked by it generous, yet Man exploits and pollutes these resources extremely the more he get prosperous and acknowledged through them. The sever exploitation of nature leads to an environmental crises that is needed to be tackled and studied thoroughly in order to save the future and in order to save the future, one need to raise awareness of the next generation. Green literature is one of the created tools to raise consciousness about that issue. The importance of the study lies in validity to change the set of society's current cultural ideologies. Utilization of Children literature helps in constructing a new environmental

perceptions attitudes and behaviors. “Morals, like fruits, are the gift of nature. It is immoral to pick an immature fruit as this will be an abomination against nature, and it is man’s chief responsibility to redress this corruption” (Abdel-Tawab Youssef, Hayy Ibn Yakdhan 8-9) . The focal points in investigating children literature should tackle whatever concern human interaction with nature and his set perceptions concerning it. The construction of new healthy ideology in society needs new children’s books that are not only artifacts reflecting morals and values about everything, but as a source of new effective method to build environmental conceptions and life style behaviors for the present and the future.

Children literature raises number of values concerning environmental issues. The study finding focuses on these values which are thought to be powerful modes of shaping the children understanding and mindset. The inter-relatedness between the children’s live and their surroundings is what matters most. The application of Eco criticism in analyzing children literature is the utmost need today in order to help the preservation of the environment. The study questions the narrative mechanism and weather it offer an appropriate conceptualization to ecological issues. I a paper titled “The Intersection between Ecocriticism and Children’s Literature: The Case of Abdel-Tawab Youssef”, Abdulgawad Elnady declares that “ Nowhere can this ecocritical message be fully comprehended as in children’s literature which is deemed by many scholars as the most fertile soil for sowing the seeds of ecological awareness in young hearts and minds”.

The research questions three important issues concerning the main ideas of the discussion: Firstly, it questions how do the literary texts apply the concept of Ecology and how is it related to the idea of establishing and promoting an Eco-Consciousness through Children Literature? Secondly, it questions the ideology presented in the literary texts and if it agrees with the wisdom of environmental education being a priority at early ages? Thirdly, it questions the validity of Literature to establish a new and healthy environmental conceptions and life style behaviors?

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: BETWEEN THE ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND THE ECOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Environmental education is a common perception that includes all ages, but it requires a considerable priority at early ages. It is important requirement for healthy child development. Iman A. Hanafy states that; “Man is re-imagined in the light of a set of ecologically-based principles of humans as biological entities, physically dependent on earth's ecology, but also culturally dependent on it.” Children are the symbol of purity and innocence as declared in William Words Worth’s 1807 “Ode in Intimation of Immortality” on one hand, and they are assumed to have no experience or understanding of it on the other hand. The benefits of fiction or children literature in general lies in the opportunity it provides to feed them with important and broadening perspectives, critical thinking and intercultural competence. Man needs a revolution in thought and it is mainly dependent on the “power of awareness” as (Scott Slovic, 1992) puts it. Ecological consciousness should begin at a molecular level in order to highlight an anthropocentric effect and develop empathy for human and non-human nature. An Eco critical analysis of nature in children literature affirms Andy (Gruenberg, 2005) argument who states “that we ourselves are a part of nature and not outside of it” p.4. Unlike Ralph Waldo

Emerson (1957) who assumes that external nature is “all that is separate from us, all which Philosophy distinguishes as the NOT ME” (p.22). For him, nature refers to strictly natural environments, unchanged by man; space, the air, the river, the leaves.

Nevertheless, eco critics concentrate their efforts to restore the human ability to interact with nature freely, spontaneously and instinctively. Ruskin Bond (2011), in his short stories adopts the friendly relationship between Man and Nature. It shows a great interdependence and seizes the attention to man’s unthoughtful actions of man towards nature. He conveys his strong believes in the healing powers of nature through the stories titled “An Island of Trees” in which he explains the deep bond between humans and non-humans in case of true love. Through these stories, he tries to show the importance of nature in man’s life. “The Tree Lover”, “The Cherry Tree’s”, “All Creatures Great and Small”, “No Room for a Leopard” Lawrence Coupe (2000) suggests that:

The most important branch of green studies, which considers the relationship between human and non-human life as represented in literary texts and which theorizes about the place of literature in the struggle against environmental destruction. (Coupe, 2000,p.302)

In an essay titled “Foundation-Stones”, Natural History for Children in St. Nicholas Magazine, Kaye Adkins explains the role of children literature as to:

improve society, provide moral and ethical guidance, and help the growing middle class, as well as immigrants, share the values of ‘patriotism, respect for the family, hard work, self-reliance, and social concern’ in addition to connecting religion and science. (Adkins, 2004, p.1)

Not to forget the most familiar figure in children literature “Peter Pan” who is examined carefully by M. Lynn Byrd in his essay entitled “Somewhere outside the forest” Ecological Ambivalence in Neverland From the Little White Bird to Hook” and proved that Peter Pan’s myth is Eco critical then applied Cheryll Glotfelty view point of Eco criticism on it. Clotfelty defines Eco criticism as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” and that relationship is seen clearly in peter pan in which the fairy tale and the adventure tale are beautifully blended in a legendary creation.

The Island in Williams Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* and the Forest in Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games* Iis the representative of the old West and the myth of an uncharted parts of the world as the desert in Sam Shepard’ *True West* is a predominant motif in the play. It represents the promise of life outside the boundaries. Such settings have almost supernatural attraction. In her research titled” Fathers and Sons: Family Relationships in Sam Shepard’s Buried Child and True West” Nibras Jawad Kadhem explains the conflict between Lee and his brother Austin:

As they face off to attack one another, “the figures of the brothers now appear to be caught in a vast desert-like landscape” (TW, 290). This image of the “desert-like landscape” reinforces the idea that the brothers have succumbed to their father's influence and, like the father, they now find themselves isolated in a “vision” of the desert. (Kadhem,2008, p.199)

3. WILLIAMS GOLDING'S LORD OF THE FLIES AND SUZANNE COLLINS' THE HUNGER GAMES UNDER FOCUS

The research will examine some similar points which binds Williams Golding's *lord of the flies* and Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* novels and help in promoting an eco-consciousness through no direct connections are mentioned in *The Lord of the Flies* Ralph realizes after exploring the place that they landed on a deserted island "This is an island. At least I think it's an island. That's a reef out in the sea"(2). The place seems amazing reminiscent of the Garden Eden "Eyes shining, mouths open, triumphant, they savoured the right of domination"(29). Golding concentrated on the value of nature as an untouched and enchanting piece of the earth;

The shore was fledged with palm trees. These stood or leaned or reclined against the light and their green feathers were a hundred feet up in the air. The ground beneath them was a bank covered with coarse grass, torn everywhere by the upheavals of fallen trees, scattered with decaying coconuts and palm saplings. Behind this was the darkness of the forest proper and the open space of the scar. (Golding, 2007,p.4)

And that it seems like a paradise which has an “incredible pool”. He “did a surface dive and swam under water with his eyes open; the sandy edge of the pool loomed up like a hill-side. He turned over holding his nose, and a golden light danced and shattered just over his face”(8). *The Hunger Games* final book *Mockingjay* also presents such kind of utopian vision in the image of The Meadow which can be found I katniss' song to her dying loved tribute “Rue”:

*Deep in the meadow, hidden far away
A cloak of leaves, a moonbeam ray,
Forget your woes and let your troubles lay
And when again it's morning, they'll wash away.* (Collins, 2010, p. 284)

Then repeated again at the end of the novel in the following quotation:

They play in the Meadow. (...) It took five, ten, fifteen years for me to agree. But Peeta wanted them so badly (...). How can I tell them about that world without frightening them to death? My children, who take the words of the song for granted:

Deep in the meadow, under the willow

*A bed of grass, a soft green pillow
Lay down your head, and close your sleepy eyes
And when you awake, the sun will rise.
Here it's safe, here it's warm
Here the daisies guard you from every harm
Here your dreams are sweet and tomorrow brings them true
Here is the place where I love you. (Collins, 2010, p. 455)*

Nature teaches innocence and never has natural enemies. The idea of evil is rooted in man's set of perceptions of life. The idea of a "beastie", "a snake thing, ever so big" as Piggy states is unbelievable for Ralph at least and to which he replies "Fancy thinking the beast was something you could hunt and kill" (143). The boys interpret their feelings about nature according to their understanding and experience only. When night prevails they undergo a new kind of feeling due to their ignorance and young age:

Behind them the silver of moon had drawn clear of the horizon. Before them, something like a great ape was sitting asleep with its head between its knees. Then the wind roared in the forest, there was confusion in the darkness and the creature lifted its head, holding towards them the ruin of a face. (Golding, 2007, p142-43)

in *Catching Fire* Collins expresses literally war destruction effect on nature which turns Districts 12 to piles of ash (Collins, 2010 p.6 and a 'sea of gray', p.3 'the capitol destroys District 13 and it nature severely, their city was "smoldering ruins" and desertification' (Bradford, Mallan, Stephens & McCallum, 2007, pp. 94-95). Peeta also puts in clearly in his speech 'is this really in *Hunger Games*, the capitol is the source of all evil, the represent absolute corrupted power which corrupt absolutely'

In the autumn, a few brave souls sneak into the woods to harvest apples. But always in sight of the Meadow. Always close to run back to the safety of District 12 if trouble arises. 'District Twelve. Where you can starve to death in safety'. (Collins, 2008, p. 6-7)

In order to promote an ecological knowledge and consciousness, Man need to explore all aspects of nature around him. The four elements are equal in Golding's *Lord of the Rings*; fire, earth, wind and water. in the middle of that uninhabited is land, the boys are forced to interact with these original elements to which they are belong basically. In her article "The elements of William Golding" Irving Malin, suggests that:

Piggy and fire? Jack and earth? Simon and air? Ralph and water?...Golding realizes that even "primitive life" remains mysterious. There is no doubt; however, he associates personality and element.... The four boys constantly touch the elements, whether or not they realize they do. Because they are bound to different elements (in different combinations) they battle one

another. And they torment themselves in their desire to rule (or be ruled by) only one element. (Malin,1965, p.38)

Collin's on the other hand names her two empathetic characters are Rue and Prim after plants "I bite my lips; rue is a small yellow flower that grows in the Meadow. Rue. Primrose" (Collins, 2008, p.121). The presence of a man in the lab of nature helps in treating his wounds katniss remarks : 'Gale says I never smile except in the woods' (Collins, 2008, p. 7), 'I think of Gale who is only really alive in the woods, with its fresh air and sunlight and clean, flowing water' (Collins, 2009, p. 5) and 'An immersion into greenery and sunlight will surely help me to sort out my thoughts' (Collins, 2010, p. 62).

Both novels revolve around the benefits of interaction between human and non-human objects and imagery in the environment. Even behaviors tackled in nature are subjects to investigation and examination like hunting, making fire, throwing stones. The first imagery is Ralph's conch, the conch is taken from nature to help in organizing and lead the boys in a civilized way. It symbolizes authority and power where the boys strongly strive to attain. They try to achieve a new and better identity through primitive and simple natural objects and behaviors. Piggy's glasses suggest the intellect and science while jack's both edges sharpened stick represent his eagerness to act like a hunter and surprise the boys with pig's meat. Hunting for food is a reasonable activity if it does not trespass the limits of logic and respectable means. katniss declares that she might "be viewed as a source of food herself"(Collins, 2008 P.188) Katniss considers nature as human's nurturing parent: 'The woods became our savior, and each day I went a bit further into its arms' (Collins, 2008, p. 62). The following quotation asserts the distinguish role of nature in man's life: 'He plucks a few blackberries from the bushes around us. (...) I catch it in my mouth and break the delicate skin with my teeth. The sweet tartness explodes across my tongue' (Collins, 2008, p. 9). Then Katniss adds:

I grabbed a bucket and Prim's hand and headed to the Meadow and yes, it was dotted with the golden-headed weeds. After we'd harvested those, we scrounged along inside the fence for probably a mile until we'd filled the bucket with the dandelion greens, stems and flowers. That night, we gorged ourselves on dandelion salad and the rest of the bakery bread. (Collins, 2008, p. 60)

When hunting is considered as a source of nutrition, the boys enjoy their freedom and given adventure it is turned to be an exercise of power and soon, savagery. The instinct to kill replaces the primitive need to survive. Eric S. Rabkin states:

In view of the fact that human beings evolved as hunters, it is not surprising that they have inherited a biological propensity to kill; as have all predators...It certainly has deep roots in man's biological past for the simple reason that it presents advantages for the survival of the group. (Rabkin,1983, p. 213)

Even rational Katniss seeks enjoyment through needless hunting even when in District 13, they are not short of food, yet some characters refuse to subdue to their human vulnerability. Peeta refuses to become 'a piece in their Games', Simon on the other hand has the strength of mind and serves to add a distinguish insight into the novel. Piggy also provides the novel with the best ideas with his intelligent, foresight and helpful manners.

In children literature, nature is meant to illuminate a living landscape and not capture a static portrait. It is a process of developing sensational awareness. In *Lord of the Rings*, the boys relationship to nature is developed daily and mixed with pleasure and delight and sort of fear for the unknown depths of her realities "palm trees", "a coral reef", "some act of God"(8). "There's pigs; there's food; and bathing-water in that little stream along there—and everything"(35). Golding uses a set of phrases to enrich the boys experience in encountering nature due to her role in fulfilling their biological needs such as "palm trees" and "coconuts with green". In *The Hunger Games*, Gale and Katniss express their animal like behavior in a vivid way: 'Silent, needing no words to communicate, because here in the woods we move as two parts of one being' (Collins, 2010, p. 63). Then gives another live image as in her description to the birds 'ability to sense the hovercrafts before her';

All I can do is follow the others, the rabbits and deer, and I even spot a wild dog pack shooting through the woods. I trust their sense of direction because their instincts are sharper than mine. But they are much faster; flying through the underbrush as gracefully as my boots catch on roots and fallen tree limbs, that there's no way I can keep pace with them. (Collins, 2008, p. 208)

The solutions for Man's collective problem that is 'reluctance to rediscover and accept his ecological identity' might be through Nature as it helps to provide him with fundamental elements to reinforce order and enables him to have a strong hold with life. Nature wins at the end and achieve victory as It is the only source for human resources. Technology's basic task is to preserve these resources. In *Lord of the Rings*, they boys behavior is turned to be more ritualized and insane as they scream "KILL THE PIG, CUT HER THORAT, SPILL HER BLOOD" then they snatches Piggy's glass before his even notices that. Yet Harold Fromm asserts the role of the technology to save presence of nature from human's consciousness- from states;

Nature, whose effects on man were formerly immediate, is now mediated by technology so that it appears that technology and not Nature is actually responsible for everything. This has given to man a sense that he mentally and voluntarily determines the ground of his own existence and that his body is almost a dispensable adjunct of his being. This is modern man's own peculiar mythology. (Glotfelty, Cheryll and Harold Fromm. Eds.,1996, p.33)

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The rediscovery is accomplished in *The Lord of the Flies* when the Naval Officer arrives to the island. The boys exercise of control over living things is not actual but as an illusion of mastery. Jack's power also vanishes and he cries for his fanciful lost paradise. The paradise where he has dreamt to be the only chief. And that's one of the didactic messages indirectly meant in the novels. "Justice is achieved in favor of the nature". Katniss and Peeta on the other hand, manage against all odds to survive. *The Hunger Games* presents one of the most postmodern evils in the society that contradict nature and naturality in life namingly manipulation through media coverage. Referring to *The Hunger Games*, Vivenne Mullere (2012) writes;

In our current times, violent video games and reality television shows serve much the same purpose; they are our modern bread and circuses and they are potentially dangerous detractors from what might really matter in terms of humanity's greater goals or the truths that their virtual mode so entertainingly conceals. (Mullere, 2012,p.54)

4. CONCLUSIONS

The research sums up that man plays a significant role in the environment and can bring about drastic changes due to the fact that he is the one who is responsible for harming the component of the exist environment. Man must balance between his needs and his demands of the ecosystem. And that Children's literature might raise back a sense of equilibrium and ethical justice because this kind of literature is characterized by creative and imaginative scenarios which stimulate the readers to reconsider their behaviors with the environment. A healthy eco identity is possible only when formed in a society with healthy ideologies and environment. The research finds that William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* portrays the evils take place when Man neglects his responsibility toward nature and thinks that civilization is a separate part of nature. While Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* shows the ugly face of life when Machine replace Nature and Naturality. In a postmodern society; human is transformed into machine and lost connection with whatever realistic and natural. It asserts that restoring the healthy relationships with the environment is the only way to heal post modern's Man dilemmas.

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