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Eco Criticism and Ethics

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Eco criticism, broadly speaking, is the study of the representation in literature of the non-human world, largely from the perspective of anxieties around humanity's destructive impact on the planet. "... 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, eco criticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies" (Glotfelty xviii). Eco criticism is the study of literature and the environment from an interdisciplinary point of view, where literature scholars analyze texts that illustrate environmental concerns and examine the various ways literature treats the subject of nature. Some eco critics brainstorm possible solutions for the correction of the contemporary environmental situation, though not all eco critics agree on the scholarship can be found the purpose, methodology, or scope of eco criticism. In the United States, eco criticism is often associated with the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE), which hosts biennial meetings for scholars who deal with environmental matters in literature. ASLE. Publishes a journal—Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment (ISLE). Environmental ethics is the part of environmental philosophy which considers extending the traditional boundaries of ethics from solely including humans to including the non-human world. It exerts influence on a large range of disciplines including environmental law, environmental sociology, eco theology, ecological economics, ecology and environmental geography.

- "We are facing a global crisis today, not because of how ecosystems function but rather because of how our ethical systems function. Getting through the crisis requires understanding our impact on nature as precisely as possible, but even more, it requires understanding those ethical systems and using that understanding to reform them. Historians, along with literary scholars, anthropologists, and philosophers, cannot do the reforming, of course, but they can help with the understanding" (Worster, quoted by Glotfelty xxi).
- The "theoretical phase, which is far reaching and complex, drawing on a wide range of theories to raise fundamental questions about the symbolic construction of gender and sexuality within literary discourse."(xxii)
- "Analogous work in eco criticism includes examining the symbolic construction of species. How has literary discourse defined the human?" (xxiv)

Environmental issues and environmental literary studies have become challenging and discursive for the writers and academicians since their turn to environment and nature in the 1980s and 1990s. It is acknowledged that the roots of ecological crises are philosophical. That is why environmental ethics emerged as a discipline in philosophy to examine the moral relationship of man with nature and environment. In spite of the fact that nature was the interest of much nineteenth and twentieth century philosophy, it was not until the 1970s that contemporary environmental ethics appeared as an academic discipline. The need for an essential change of values in relation to the environment entailed the emergence of new

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sub-discipline of philosophy. This emergence was due to the increasing awareness of the influences of technology, industry, economic expansion and population growth on the environment in the 1960s. Such awareness is believed to be encouraged by Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), in which she warned the reader against the serious threat of the widespread use of chemical pesticide, destroying of wildlife, and by Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb* (1968), in which he cautioned the reader against the destructive impacts of the constant increase in human population on the resources of the planet. Environmental ethics also dwells on the reductions in plant and animal biodiversity, the destruction and loss of wilderness, the worsening ecosystems and climate changes. Environmental ethics frames the moral obligations of man to such worries. It questions the environmental crises mostly in philosophical, social and financial terms. It mainly asks two essential questions: "What duties do humans have with respect to the environment?" and "why?" In other words, environmental ethics calls into question the alleged moral superiority of humankind over other organic and inorganic beings on earth. It seeks to place intrinsic value on natural environment and its more-than-human contents. Therefore, the distinction between intrinsic value and instrumental value is of great significance in the literature on environmental ethics because the former renders moral duty on the part of human beings to respect it, protect it and avoid from damaging it. In this sense, deep ecological movement holds a considerable place in the field of environmental ethics. Deep ecology, introduced by the Norwegian mountaineer and philosopher Arne Naess in 1973, attempts to unite humankind and nature in order to overcome environmental crises, conflicts and immorality. Deep ecological movement intends to redesign all humankind's values, methods and systems so as to conserve the ecological and cultural variety of the natural systems. Naess supported the idea that man is a part of the earth rather than apart from it. If this idea of him is fully appreciated, man will realize that doing harm to nature means hurting an integral part of him, and thus will give up injuring nature uncontrollably. In order to achieve this integration, Naess came up with the idea of ecological self, which denotes transcendence of fragmentation and duality, and indicates going towards wholeness and greatness. This ecological, or wider, self is qualified as 'self - realization', which refers to action for nature both for its own sake and for the benefit and well being of humankind. The concept of self-realization enables human beings to realize their inherent qualities and to form internal connections with all other parts of earth. The human self is completed through the identification of the human ego with nature. In other words, to appreciate and care for the natural environment allows for respect and care for the human self because nature is essentially a part of humankind with which they should identify. Therefore, distancing one's self from nature means distancing from one's essence and identity. However, some deep ecologists are of the opinion that arguments and debates over environmental crises and ecological destruction are not sufficient to overcome environmental immorality of the humankind. Ecological awareness should also be raised through art, poetry and music. That is why deep ecologists do not establish supplementary moral principles upon environment but suggest an entirely new

perspective. This environmentally-ethical sensibility of deep ecology, which is a "substantial reorientation of our whole civilization". This enrichment is maintained by Eco criticism, which is a re-examination of how man perceives and constructs the world in literary works. The term 'eco criticism' is considered to have been coined by William Rueckert in 1978. He defined it as "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature" (Glotfelty, pp107). Eco criticism concerns the interconnections between culture and nature, the human and the non-human, literature and ecology, body and mind. Eco criticism is a turn "from ego-consciousness to eco-consciousness". (PP108). Although environmental ethics questions what kinds of thing are intrinsically valuable, good or bad, what makes an action morally right or wrong, and what duties or obligations the humans have to the natural environment and on which grounds, it does not give definite or straight answers to these questions. These questions are rather resolved in literary texts through the vivid portrayal of the environmental crises such as drought, flood, consumerism, pollution, and through the depictions of the transcorporeal effects of environmental immorality.

The short story "The Terminal Beach" tells the story of Traven, an ex-air force pilot who is marooned on the island which was once used as a testing ground for nuclear weapons. The island is explained to be "a state of mind" in the story. The island, which is a built environment, is depicted as follows: Despite the sand and the few anemic palms, the entire landscape of the island was synthetic, a man-made art effect with all the associations of a vast system of derelict concrete motorways. Since the moratorium on atomic tests, the island had been abandoned by the Atomic Energy Commission, and the wilderness of weapons, aisles, towers, and blockhouses ruled out any attempt to return it to its natural state. Traven's voluntary decision to stay on the island stems from his desperation to face the death of his wife and son. Throughout the story, Traven's memories, psyche and questioning of his inner voice are revealed with the portrayal of the island. In the same way, the physical condition of the island also affects Traven's mind and his moral stance. Ballard does not characterize Traven with his individual qualities but with his relation to the island. The author pointed out about this story that "he first true s-f story, and one I intend to write myself if no one else will, is about a man with amnesia lying on a beach and looking at a rusty bicycle wheel, trying to work out the absolute essence of the relationship between them.

Traven's struggle of his dreams, nightmares and the unconscious are projected onto the island and the beach which surround and imprison him. The metaphor of the beach is significant in that it serves as the place between the island and techno-civilized world as well as nature and culture, and as the place where the past, present and future are conflated. The beach allows Traven to come to realize the destructive effects of science and technology on nature and humankind. Thus, the beach becomes a border zone to achieve a synthesis of different elements for salvation. As in Gasiorek's words, Ballard attempted to "overcome divisions between self and world, the rational and the irrational, conscious and the unconscious subletting them in a libratory synthesis". The word "terminal", implying limit, boundary, death or the end, is also figurative in the sense that the use of atomic bombs signifies the end of history

and the rise of an age of evanescence: “Increasingly, our concepts of past, present and future are being forced to revise themselves. Just as the past, in social and psychological terms, became a casualty of Hiroshima and the nuclear age, so in its turn the future is ceasing to exist, devoured by the all-voracious present”. It means a sort of “cognitive remapping of a world that has lost its bearings in time and space”. The beach becomes “a world of closed exits concealed behind endless corners”.

Ballard’s work is a counteraction to the scientifically and technologically improved society in the face of environmental immortality. The author created Traven as a form of corporeality who represents weakness, susceptibleness and human limitation. Traven reflects the psychopathological situation of humankind in his precarious existence. Traven can not synthesize his body and materiality with the concrete island so as to create meaning and to have signification. Ballard deconstructs the anthropocentric body through Traven’s self extermination among the scientific and technological conveniences. Vivian Sobchack explained the correlation between corporeality and ethics in these words: both significant affection and a moral stance are based on the lived sense and feeling of the human body not merely as a material object one possesses and analyses among others, but as a material subject that experiences its own objectivity, that has the capacity to bleed and suffer and hurt for others because it can sense its own possibilities for suffering and pain. Traven is mentally bleeding for the loss of his family. His subjectivity is objectified among the concrete blockhouses, bunkers and plane wrecks, and this objectification reflects the loss of humanity in the face of modern science and technology. The ethical stance of Traven, as atomic body, is determined by his materiality and his capacity to suffer. The more he suffers, the more he realizes the detrimental outcomes of nuclear weapons.

Traven awakens to the failure of the technologically and scientifically facilitated humankind, desirous of the complete control of both human and non-human environments. As Buck-Morss stated, what seems to fascinate modern ‘man’ is the narcissistic illusion of total control. The fact that one can imagine something that is not is extrapolated in the fantasy that one can recreate the world according to plan (a degree of control impossible, for example, in the creation of a living, breathing child). It is the fairy-tale promise that wishes are granted without the fairy-tale’s wisdom that the consequences can be disastrous. In the story, Ballard criticizes the “demise of feeling and emotion” and the “sensory alienation” during the thermonuclear age by suggesting the notions of ‘responsibility’ and ‘responsibility’ of human beings for the natural environment. The former notion signifies the ethical or political responsiveness of emotional sensitivity to the sorrows of all life forms in nature while the latter notion implies the eagerness of sensory perception through a withdrawal from science and technology that intervene in human’s experience of reality. The landscape of the island exhibits “a repressed premonition of [human’s] death” because of his irresponsibility and lack of responsibility for nature. In the end, Traven stands up to the condition of modernity which numbs the organisms, deadens the senses and represses the memory. He strives to overcome his technologically and corporeally limited environment through a more primitive mode of existence.

Traven’s desire to remain on the island despite some rescue efforts refers to the closed space as an exclusionary practice, by means of which his imaginary transcendence about his wife and son provides him for a sort of purification from the technocratic world. Traven constructs his own unique mental geography of Eniwetok though he was confronted by an open possibility of being rescued. Restrictively immersed in his unconsciousness, dreams and hallucinations, Traven chases his own utopia of rejoining with his dead wife and son. His search for his dead wife and son turns out to be his quest for identity among the bunkers and blockhouses on the abandoned island. Furthermore, Traven becomes the everyman of the post-industrial and post-war period suffering from consumerism and capitalism, who can be named as “Homohydrogenensis”. Traven could also represent a toxic version of Robinson Crusoe in the nuclear jungle who struggles to be redeemed from ecological holocaust, which stands as the embodiment of the death of his wife and son. Ballard’s works of fiction are imaginative geographies dealing with the ontological link between text and world, and body and nature. His imaginative geography becomes the ideological and discursive reproduction of the present social spaces. Therefore, the ethical stance of the story is handled with the parallel trialectical relation between the geographic/physical, the imaginary/mental, and the social. Ballard’s environmental ethics is created with such a ‘third space’ which is a sort of transitional figurative space located by the trialectical relation, which turns out to be a dystopian space. In this sense, the terminal beach becomes a self-reflexive medium of Traven’s life. He “among the blocks... find[s] the image of [himself] free of time and space. This island is an ontological Garden of Eden”. The dystopian space shows the human limits and ecological dangers encountered within the technological and consumerist geographies of the capitalist order.

Ballard’s story produces an imaginative geography constructed by the liminal symbolism of real geographies such as Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Therefore, historical and social events, both at the local and global levels, form the context of the story. The narrative takes place on Eniwetok, a large coral atoll in the Pacific Ocean, which was really used by the United States for nuclear testing during the years between 1948 and 1958. [27] The island is also textually situated within the nuclear landscape. In a way, Ballard re-invented the current reality to go back to the past the pre-colonial, pre-industrial and pre-war time when environmental morality was not so much corrupted. Ballard’s Eniwetok in the story comes as an imaginative geography, which is rather an interwoven textual or literary space articulated by the events of the real history. His virtual environment of nuclear destruction is a criticism of “the production of a geopolitical peace through nuclear terror”. The camera towers, radio-cabins, geometry of the airstrip, and systematic locations of the blockhouses all refer to the technological surveillance, which stands for a regulated and rationalized disciplinary. It indicates the taming of the wilderness, loss of innocence of the natural environment, and thus human’s lack of environmental morality.

The story depicts pessimism, repression and uncertainty of a post-war world in a post-industrial and thermonuclear age. The physical setting of the island expresses, affects and portrays Traven’s psychological condition. The story is

a psychic reconstruction of space, and an embodiment of techno scientific man's disillusionment and obsessions. Traven, isolated in time and space, represents modern man's displacement both in the internal and external worlds due to the destruction he has been causing in the natural environment. As an every man of the technocratic world, Traven represents haunted bodies who have lost moral responsibility for environmental problem. The academic field of environmental ethics grew up in response to the work of scientists such as Rachel Carson and events such as the first Earth Day in 1970, when environmentalists started urging philosophers to consider the philosophical aspects of environmental problems. Two papers published in *Science* had a crucial impact: Lynn White's "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis" (March 1967) and Garrett Hardin's "The Tragedy of the Commons" (December 1968). Also influential was Garrett Hardin's later essay called "Exploring New Ethics for Survival", as well as an essay by Aldo Leopold in his *A Sand County Almanac*, called "The Land Ethic," in which Leopold explicitly claimed that the roots of the ecological crisis were philosophical (1949).

The Christian world view sees the universe as created by God, and humankind accountable to God for the use of the resources entrusted to humankind. Ultimate values are seen in the light of being valuable to God. This applies both in breadth of scope - caring for people (Matthew 25) and environmental issues, e.g. environmental health (Deuteronomy 22.8; 23.12-14) - and dynamic motivation, the love of Christ (Corinthians 5.14f) and dealing with the underlying spiritual disease of sin, which shows itself in selfishness and thoughtlessness. In many countries this relationship of accountability is symbolized at harvest thanksgiving. (B.T. Adeney: *Global Ethics in New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology* 1995 Leicester)

Eco critical thought, as it is understood today, is weighed down by numerous apparently insoluble contradictions, and an analysis of which, it is hoped will address some fundamental issues plaguing the discipline and show why in its present form, it is destined to fail as a movement. The present impasse in eco critical thought springs as much from its inherent contradictions as from the absence of a firm ethical, philosophical underpinning. This study tries to highlight a few such paradoxes in eco criticism, especially in its western variety, and calls for a perspective shift in the form of a philosophical framework. The first paradox is that human being cannot entirely do away with the 'use' of non-human sphere, as cultural production of all sorts necessitate the use, and even some exploitation, of nature. Because the non-human realm bears the brunt of the human production processes and consumption habits, neither an exit form civilization for forest, nor maximal amount of ecological awareness can turn us away from 'using' nature completely. Hence one has the impossible task of differentiating the 'right' use of nature from the 'wrong' one. Secondly, the notion of a return to nature is ambiguous due to the sheer range of meaning that the word 'nature' carries. If the term 'nature' designates at once the pure wilderness of deserts and oceans as well as the mechanically mediated cultivations, parks and gardens, a dialogue on eco criticism is liable to terminate in a series of equivocations. Hence unless more clarity on the meaning of nature, specifically the permissible extent of human cultural

intervention in the nonhuman sphere to be termed nature, is available, the call for a return to nature will remain ambiguous.

Eco criticism is not just a means of analyzing nature in literature; it implies a move toward a more bio centric world-view, an extension of ethics, a broadening of humans' conception of global community to include nonhuman life forms and the physical environment. Just as feminist and African American literary criticism call for a change in culture--that is, they attempt to move the culture toward a broader world-view by exposing an earlier narrowness of view--so too does ecological literary criticism advocate for cultural change by examining how the narrowness of our culture's assumptions about the natural world has limited our ability to envision an ecologically sustainable human society. (xiii) In the following year, Michael Cohen asserts that "by definition, ecological literary criticism must be engaged. It wants to know but also wants to do.... Eco criticism needs to inform personal and political actions, in the same way that feminist criticism was able to do only a few decades ago." Like any recently born thing, eco criticism is experiencing tremendous growth and development in these early years of its existence. In the short time since it first appeared as a movement, some of the initial concerns that marked its inaugural moments have already been answered. Given the veritable explosion of interest in the field, Glotfelty's concern in 1996 with the traditional failure of the literary profession to address "green" issues, for instance, now seems something of a nonissue. Glen Love, paraphrasing Glotfelty's point, argued in his contribution to *The Eco criticism Reader* that race, class, and gender are words which we see and hear everywhere at our professional meetings and in our current publications the English profession has failed to respond in any significant way to the issue of the environment. That was then, and, as Love knows, things are changing: the English profession is responding. Love has recently noted that "the study of literature and the environment and the practice of profession has failed to respond in any significant way to the issue of the environment. That was then, and, as Love knows, things are changing: the English profession is responding. Love has recently noted that "the study of literature and the environment and the practice of eco criticism has begun to assume an active place in the profession".

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