

Anthropocentric & Eco Ethical Perspective in Jean Giono's the Man Who Planted Trees

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Abstract:

In recent decades, the environment has posed enormous threats to human society and Mother Earth. Nature is indeed a very powerful force but it also takes care and a soft hand and a kind heart to support the growth of green life style and well-being of environment especially trees. Trees are the most vital part for life but report says that we are experiencing a huge rapid deforestation in our country. The Widespread misuse of natural resources has kept us at the edge of the ditch. Deforestation of tropical rain forests, rapid depletion of fossil fuels, disordered seasons, frequent global ecological disasters and our environment is on the verge of collapse. In this context, a new theory of reading nature writing called ecocriticism emerged in the last decade of the last century. It is a world-born movement that exists as a reaction to man's anthropocentric attitude towards nature. The purpose of this paper is to explore the ecocritical perspective in Jean Giono's short story "The Man Who Planted Trees". The story depicts a Shepherd, who stand apart from all of us. His environmental virtues and act of planting revives the environment and revives life in the desert. This environmental oriented literary study promotes the ecological literacy of the reader. This paper therefore not interested in the characteristic of the story, but rather in its representation of the environment influences and as an effective tool to cope up with his hazardous situations and motivate the reader as well as people to plant more trees like Elzeard Bouffier. This paper can also be read as an interpretive tool for analysing nature writing and how it linked to Environmental criticism, Animal studies Green cultural studies Eco philosophy, deep ecology, Eco spiritualism, and more.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Anthropocentric, Environmental virtues, Deforestation, Eco-Ethics

Introduction

Literature has always played an important role in creating awareness about environmental ethics and ecocriticism. Through literature, we can explore the Anthropocentric attitude towards nature and its consequences. Literature, especially short stories, have been used to portray the environmental virtues that are essential for a sustainable future. English literature has been especially effective in conveying these messages through works like short stories, novels and poems. Authors have used these mediums to highlight issues such as deforestation, global warming and pollution. Through their work, they have encouraged readers to think about their responsibility towards nature and its preservation. Ecocriticism began in the mid-1990s as way to find the connection between literature and natural environment. It was heralded by the publication of two famous works Glotfelty's "The Ecocriticism Reader" and Buell's "The Environmental Imagination". Cheryll Glotfelty Defies Ecocriticism as "ecological criticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the natural environment" (*The Ecocriticism Reader*, n.d.). Eco-

criticism reflects the role of the natural environment that we can see in our imagination. It is also the introduction of the concept of "nature" which can be related to the life of "human" Life. Thus, nature and culture are linked together.

Jean Giono's "The Man Who Planted Trees" depicts how Elzeard Bouffier, the shepherd, planted thousands of trees single-handedly in a country which was dying for the lack of trees. Giono presents his hero Bouffier as an icon for common people to love the trees or to be more precisely to develop a eco-friendly living style. This can be a better solution to the problem of deforestation due to the ruthless cutting of trees by man. The short fiction is a powerful message to humanity that if we love and protect nature, she will not only nourish us but also sustain our future generation.

Literature and the Environment as a notion

Environmental literature has been popular for centuries, as authors have attempted to highlight the relationship between humans and the natural world. From ancient myths and fables to contemporary eco-philosophy, these tales frequently examine the relationship between humans and the natural world. There are several types of environmental literature, ranging from poetry about trees to novels on eco-systems. Through these works, we get a respect for the environment and a knowledge of our relationship with nature. This literary style is especially significant for bringing attention to environmental concerns and motivating readers to consider their influence on the earth. Literature may provide a brand-new understanding of man's relationship to his environment by studying various ecological views.

Ecocriticism is a new branch of literary study that focuses on nature's role in literature. While it took literary form in the 1990s, this revisionist movement grew into a banyan tree in less than two and a half decades. In the same way that feminist critique explores language and literature from a gender perspective and Marxist criticism reads works with an awareness of modes of production and economic class, ecocriticism approaches literary studies from an earth-centered perspective. Barry argues, "For the ecocritic, nature truly exists, out there outside ourselves, not needing to be ironized as an idea by enclosing it in knowing inverted commas, but actually present as a thing that affects us, and which we might impact fatally if we abuse it."

The use of ecology and ecological concepts to the scientific study of literary works, as defined by Rueckert. Ecology refers to the scientific study of the relationships between the air, land, water, animals, plants, etc., whereas ecocriticism considers humans to be a part of the environment and investigates the link between humans and nature. Of course, historians, along with literary experts, anthropologists, and philosophers, cannot change, but they may aid in comprehension.

Now, ecocriticism is spreading very swiftly. Although nature has been the major source of inspiration for authors throughout history, the revelation of global environmental concerns has never generated as much passion. At times of environmental crises, they seek viable solutions to environmental issues such as the greenhouse effect, acid rain, pollution, toxic consequences, deforestation, etc. According to Buell, this critique of the environment has two facets. The objective of the "first wave of ecocriticism" is to honour nature. In contrast, "the second wave of ecocriticism" is occasionally called "revisionist ecocriticism." Ecocriticism has gained worldwide traction, and authors from the East to the West have made contributions to the field. There are three main models of ecocriticism: (i) Domination Model (Anthropocentric -Humans dominate the environment) (ii) Care-taking Model (Still anthropocentric-It positions humans as caretakers of the earth) (iii) Bio-centric Model (It rejects anthropocentric views and explores connectedness of all living and non-living things.)

The Short Story in a Nutshell

The narrator went on a long hike about forty years ago in the old region where the Alps penetrate into Provence. The land was barren and monotonous. Only wild lavender grew there. It was an area of total emptiness. The narrator had set up camp near an abandoned village but had to look for another site because his stock of water was exhausted. He walked for five hours but he found no water. When he had almost given up all hope, he met a shepherd who gave him food and shelter. The man gave the narrator a feeling of peace. This made the narrator curious to know more about the man. He learnt that the man had planted one hundred thousand acorns of which twenty thousand had come up. He further revealed that his name was Elzeard Bouffier and he was fifty-five years of age. He had moved to this place after solitude of the death of his wife and son. He took pleasure in the place. He had decided to replace the barrenness of the land with greenery and so planted hundred acorns every day. The narrator left the next day and became engaged in war for five years. When the war came to an end, wanting to breathe some pure air, he revisited the place. He met Elzeard Bouffier again and found him as serene as before. What left the narrator speechless was the forest of oak that had come up in the region. He felt that man too could be a creator like God.

Anthropocentric view of the story

“The Man Who Planted Trees” was first published in American Magazine Vogue in 1953. It depicts how Elzeard Bouffier the shepherd, planted thousands of trees single-handedly in a country which was dying for the lack of trees. Within a very short time, the work got translated into many languages and inspired reforestation efforts worldwide. Bouffier, as Giono says, is a fictional character who has been created as a role model for people to love the trees or more precisely to make them aware planting more trees. This can be a better solution to the problem of deforestation due to the ruthless cutting of trees by man. The short fiction is a powerful message to humanity that if we love and protect nature, she will nourish us and sustain us. Over four or more decades, Bouffier strives hard to plant trees in a desolate land

“After five hours’ walking, I had still not found water and there was nothing to give me any hope of finding any. All about me was the same dryness, the same coarse grasses.”

which gradually turns to be a Garden of Eden. And in the end, the desert valley becomes vibrant with life and human habitation there is peacefully settled. There are only a few people who do not set the track of their life in the self-same rail. Such a person is Elzeard Bouffier first having lost his only son, and then his beloved wife, preferred a retired life of solitude. He took immense pleasure in living a tranquil life, with his flock of sheep and his dog. Having found nothing more important in life he resolved to remedy the grim situation of his environment. The narrator, while taking a long trip in the ancient region where the Alps thrust down into Provence had a chance to peep into his selfless activity.

“These clustered houses, although in ruins, like an old wasps’ nest, suggested that there must once have been a spring or well here. There was indeed a spring, but it was dry”

The dry well, too, symbolize that there were life forms in full bloom. After walking hours after hours in the land of dryness, he happened to meet a shepherd living a lonely life with his thirty sheep. He provided the narrator with sweet water from a deep natural well, quite unexpected in a barren country. The man shared his soup with the narrator.

“Apart from his thirty sheep he had a dog as quiet as himself and as friendly as him without being cruel to others.”

And in spite of the adversity of his surroundings, he engaged himself patiently in reforming the land in close contact with nature. This is obviously due to warfare which ravished France during the two world wars. This might also be due to some human atrocities.

Whatever may be the reason, the human habitation was getting violated due to the ruthless environment. And as there was little sustenance of life the few people living in scattered villages on these mountain slopes lived in abject misery. Unlike the charcoal burners, he is a preserver of nature. Nothing could startle his patience of planting thousands of oak trees by strenuous job thrashing iron rod into the earth for making holes and planting acorns one by one.

“There he began thrusting his iron rod into the earth, making a hole in which he planted an acorn; then he refilled the hole. He was planting oak trees.”

It seemed as a part of the natural design without catching anyone’s astonishment. Hunters started climbing into the wild in search of hares and wild boars. They attributed the gradual growth of the plants to the natural caprice of the earth. What is more interesting is that Bouffier never made a display of his work.

"Government came over to examine the place they could not identify the mystery behind the "natural forest" until the narrator revealed it to one of the forestry officers of the delegation who was his friend. The entire forest land was taken under the protection of the state and charcoal burning was strictly forbidden there. Bouffier had, of course, some initial obstacles. The sea change of the desert land was noticed by the narrator when he met Bouffier again for the ultimate time in June 1945.

About 1000 people moved there, all of whom unknowingly owing their happiness to Bouffier whose selfless deeds brought about in the physical environment and culture of the land. The people who were guilty of the savage culture hating one another have now transformed into better humans. " The narrator says-"Most amazing of all, I heard the actual sound of water falling into a pool. The meadows were turning green and the old streams got fed by the rains and snows that the forest conserved.

Eco-Ethical View

This short novella provides a vision of hope that our suffering planet sorely needs today; it is a prophetic allegory for confronting climate change and answering the call to "environmental conversion," as Pope Francis advises in "Laudato Si': On Caring for Our Common Environment." Can we accept, as Giono's story subtly asserts, that humans are "as effective as God in jobs other than destruction"?

In the story we found a shepherd's solo attempts to plant a forest in a bleak location, the foothills of the Alps, during the first part of the twentieth century. The shepherd's narrative covers two world wars and the darkest half-century in human history, much like Giono's own.

In 1913, the narrator, a young man, undertakes a walking trip of "that historic area where the Mountains plunge down into Provence." After a few days, the guy reaches the outskirts of an abandoned settlement in a vast valley of "unparalleled desolation." A number of days later, after discovering no water and "nothing to give me hope of finding some," the young man observes a little person standing against the

horizon. As he approaches, he sees a lone shepherd with 30 sheep "lying about him on the scorching dirt." The shepherd provides him water and a place to stay as he welcomes him to his home "in a fold of the plain."

Perhaps most significantly, the young man is overcome by the realisation that Bouffier had worked "in complete isolation." He concludes, "When you recalled that all of this had originated from the hands and soul of this one man, without technical resources, you realised that men could be as effective as God in realms other than destruction."

In an interview with the American author Norma Goodrich soon before his death, he stated, "It does not earn me a dime, and that is why it has fulfilled its purpose." Giono revealed to Goodrich that the objective of his novel was to "make people love trees, or more specifically, make them love planting trees." After a few years, the story was translated into at least a dozen languages, and it has subsequently spurred international forestry initiatives.

In his interview with Goodrich, Giono also maintained that authors must express optimism in exchange for the privilege to live and create. Yet he felt, as Goodrich underlines, that optimism arises from a poetic sense above all else.

Conclusion

Saint Irenaeus said, "The glory of God is the fully-alive human." We now wholeheartedly accept the author's opinion "humans are as effective as God at duties except destruction. In the face of the global environmental disaster, the birth of hope is contingent upon our response to this issue. According to Pope Francis's "Laudato Si' :- the history of our friendship with God is always tied to certain locations that take on an extremely personal significance. To embrace the land "as a sacrament of communion, as a method of sharing with God and our neighbours on a global scale" is to begin renewing the face of the globe square mile by square mile. For those with open eyes and ears, Jean Giono's simple story may inspire the artist, poet, storyteller, and perhaps even the farmer within us all. As with Jesus' parables, the narrative belongs to everyone. As we grieve our role in the suffering of the world, let us no longer waste time determining "whose it was," as the narrator of Giono's narrative inquired about the land. The Earth is our shared habitat, and its suffering is our shared cause. Let us begin carefully planting our one hundred acorns.

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