Man and Nonhuman Environment: Towards an Ecocritical Reading of J.M. Coetzee's Life and Times of Michael K

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Abstract

The advent of ecological paradigm in literary studies is significant in our age of globalization and environmental degradation which is the result of the domination of anthropocentric values. The lack of sign of an environmental standpoint in concurrent literary arena would seem to hint that despite its "revisionist energies" (Glotfelty xv), scholarship remains academic in the nuance of scholarly to the point of being environmentally unconscious of the outside world. This study examines J. M. Coetzee's novel, Life and Times of Michael K (1983) in the context of ecocriticism. Ecocritical reading attempts to negotiate man's relationship to non-human environment by using concepts of environmental consciousness, sense of place, and sustainable nostalgia. Much of environmental writing excludes 'home' as an environmental site and dismisses family that works on land. Michaels' journey to the farm in search of his mother's ancestral place and his dwelling in different places evoke entitlement, belonging, land-right issues, land tenure, and displacement. The important questions here are whose place is earth? and where to dwell? Life and Times of Michael K, thus, seeks to subvert the narrative by which the colonist creates a sense of belonging in the land. Michael K feels out of place every where he goes. He recognizes himself as an outsider, an "other", and more importantly marginalized. He confronts his right over land where he belongs. He is always subjugated to the surveillance of the state. The question of land rights is not only restricted to a non-native but also to a native like Michael K who, being a black native, is questioned about his whereabouts.

The Conclusion sums up all the key issues in the study.

Key words: ecocriticism, J. M Coetzee, ecofiction, nonhuman environment, sustainable nostalgia.

I. Ecocriticism and Literature: I durst not laugh for fear of opening my lips and receiving the bad air.
-William Shakespeare, Julius Caesar

There can be no theory of any account unless it corroborate 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.
-Walt Whitman. "A Song of the Rolling Earth"

Literature as a concept may be difficult to define, but in a generally acceptable manner critics may regard it as writing that pre-eminently reflects in depth and quality of some aspect of human experience, nurturing it from the perspective of a sensitive and insightful observer. Literature is one of the institutions of change through ideologies, values, and education. It sensitizes people to exploitative and authoritarian regimes. Literature provides a space to reconnect and refashion peoples' convictions in ever changing socio-historical and cultural contexts. It has been a site to discuss and contest various issues of race, class, and gender (Slovic 99). Traditionally, literary criticism has not had a systematic approach that focuses on ecological issues such as global warming, toxic waste, polluted drinking water, invasive species, desertification, loss of biodiversity, destruction of the ozone layer, deforestation, and extinction of species. According to ecocritics literary critics and cultural theorists have been slow to consider these changes in thinking about ecological criticism in literary studies. The term ecocriticism was coined only two decades ago, and in the last decade has the study of literature in relation to environment begun, quite suddenly, to assume the look of a major critical insurgency. The term ecocriticism has been used synonymously with green studies that reflect on the relationship between human and non-human life as embodied in literary texts. It also refers to theoretical stances around different ecological issues in literature against ecological destruction. Cheryll Glotfelty in his seminal book The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology (1996) writes:

What then is ecocriticism? 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 is reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies. (xviii)

Ecocritical approach views man's relationship with nature through his interaction with nature because it supports the idea that nature, as a literary subject, surrounds all aspects of life. What has largely been explored in literary theory concerning the environment does not focus on human work in the environment as a positive endeavor. Instead, many authors employ environmental standards to
push a political agenda that attempts to criticize or explain the importance of nature in a culture that continually destroys it.\(^2\)

The dialogue between literature and ecology is an effort to look into different discourses that help conceptualize ecology. Glen A. Love begins his well-researched book *Practical Ecocriticism* saying: "Environmental and population pressures inevitably and increasingly support the position that any literary criticism which purports to deal with social and physical reality will encompass ecological consideration" (1). According to Glotfelty, ecologically informed criticism and theory have, in fact, existed through the sixties and seventies and what was lacking was a coherent organization of these ideas (xi). Ecocriticism differs from other critical approaches since it scrutinizes the relations between writer, texts, readers and the world. It expands the notion of the world from society to the whole 'ecosphere' (Ibid x). As a theoretical field, ecocriticism redefines the boundaries of literature, deconstructing the binaries man/nature, nature/culture, and asserts its poignant role in an immensely complex global system, in which not only energy and matter but ideas also mediate (Ibid xix).

Similarly, Joseph Meeker in his seminal work *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology* (1974), affirms that as the world's only literary creatures, human beings, have the responsibility to discover the role of literature, for the welfare and survival of mankind. He extends the argument to include the natural environment saying that the "insight it offers into human relationships with other species and with the world around us" (3-4).

**II. Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michal K* in Context of Ecocriticism**

According to ecocritics, there is no particular method or theoretical apparatus available to ecocritical theory in critically analyzing the nature of a literary text. Lawrence Buell alerts in his work *The Environmental Imagination* that the depiction of natural environment should not be treated as the mere backdrop for the foregrounded human actions. To think 'ecocentrically', Buell points out that non-human environment has both provoked and compartmentalized (Buell xiii). It is true that God has given human beings dominion over the natural world, and it has nothing to do with God after that.\(^3\) The Human beings suffer under the conditions created by themselves. If they are supposed to harness nonhuman environment in the form of burning fossil fuels, destruction of the forests, they have to bear the consequences such as greenhouse effect - as it threatens to bring about a rise in sea level in the low-lying coastal areas. They are also compelled to accept its repercussion such as climate change, endangering survival of certain species etc. In such a
condition the critical engagement should not only be human-centric, but also eco-centric, keeping in view the fact that everything is part of and relevant to this universe. Ecocriticism necessitates the view that non-human environment should not be used as a mere backdrop, but as a part of the whole (Ibid xiii).

As a critical method, ecocritical reading demands a shift, a shift from a particular focused criticism to a universal approach, which is towards an ecocentric and non-anthromorphic vision of the natural world. It would then account to shifting from "one context of reading to another one, more specifically a movement from the human to the biocentric or ecocentric view of the natural world. This vision informs our reading of fictional works. It is that is a humanism informed by an awareness of the more than human" (Kern 71). However, there is a risk in claiming a universal approach which is not free from any constraints of region or class. But in a situation where the physical world is at risk, human beings need a universal approach towards ecology in spite of social, political, and geographical boundaries. Ecocritical reading seeks such an engagement where a text may not deal with a particular ecological problem, but involves the reader in a journey towards ethical, moral, and ideological understanding of ecology. So, the need to change our critical perspective demands a shift from ego-centric to eco-centric view.

The study of *Life and Times of Michal K* (1983), is based on this assumption. The argument of this study is to show how a novel like *Life and Times of Michal K*, pregnant in personal, historical, social and political issues can be read ecocritically. Though there is no explicit ecological message in *Life and Times of Michael K*, almost all aspects of Coetzee's novels underpin various issues of a human being's relationship with nonhuman environment. In a political and war ridden atmosphere the text does not ignore the ethical value of non-human environment. The novel also fulfills Buell's requirement that "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" (Buell 7-8). There are numerous instances with ecocritical implication. It is basically a novel of ideas, which through various techniques apprehends ecological issues such as: other as self, minimal existence, earth as mother, problem of language in ecological communication, nostalgic sustainability, freedom in nature, nostalgic sustainability, and ecological voice.

*Life and Times of Michael K* envelops Michael K's alienation from nature. The novel creates a texture of suffering and pain of the earth in relation to man and vice versa. *Life and Times of Michael K* is an engaging narrative set in the turbulent period of the Post-
Apartheid South Africa. *Life and Times of Michael K* is a narrative of Michael K's journey. The journey involves the 'life' and 'times' of the protagonist indulges in no heroic endeavor, but resonates a pathetic sense of heroism. The three sections of the novel employ of third and first person narrative point of view. The narrative techniques invite different ways of interpretations such as "the role of language in human being and non-human being", "colonial rule over human being and environment", "story of the oppressed class" and "relation of state to subject". Apart from these readings the novel deals with ecological issues in relation to human beings and his environment. The interpretation does not comprise of the author's direct comments or engagements. Michael K's travelling becomes the pivot of the story, the quest for an earth-centric meaning, segregating all the 'difference' a universal call for his own and other people's humanity against the backdrop of the civil war. His wandering allegorically symbolizes earth's own movement in its own course affirming the topos of human life as a journey. The disturbance in the ecological system is caused by human beings. In human endeavors earth has always been treated as "other". Similarly, war, a creation of human beings, creates differences among human beings which also results in the destruction of the non-human environment. The first person and the third person narrative of the novel is an attempt to understand Michael K, an ordinary man who bears ethical values in relation to the universe, during the time of violent social breakdown, where man becomes helpless. The helplessness of Michael K becomes the crux of the story. Coetzee tells a story of a simple man who has nothing, "no money", "no family", "no friends" (*LTMK* 142). But in his understanding, he endeavors toward non-human environment. The narrator, the doctor in the third section of the novel, even the readers make an effort to understand Michael K from their own position and understanding. The different technique Coetzee has adopted in this novel conjures different levels of meanings from different angles.

Michael K characterizes the quest for a liberation which goes beyond the prevalent and accepted conventions of political freedom. It is the yearning for a spiritual freedom that best captures his internal angst (May 68). The narrative has not discussed Michael K's internal angst directly. Michael K does not speak of his trouble and pain. This is similar to non-human environment; it is alienated, mute, and silent. It is only human beings who can communicate and speak for them. Coetzee conjures a narrative style that complements the development of this character and lends an air of authenticity to his aspiration. Michael K's journey from Cape Town to the hospital, thus, becomes allegorical. Comparing Michael K with earth shows
the clarity of the suffering of the earth. Even this is clearer in his dwelling in the earth. "Earth" is beginning to be increasingly important to him: "at last I am living off the land" (46). At the farm, he gives his mother's ashes back "to the earth" (58). In an interrogation with medical officer Michael K makes the extraordinary statement that the vegetables which he grew weren't his but "came from the earth" (139) and "what grows for all of us. We are all the children of the earth" (139). Here it signals Michael K's meshing with the earth, a kind of ecocentric point of view. The ash of his mother symbolically signifies the fragility of life, which in certain points of life, comes to ash or soil. In his voyage to the farm he epitomizes with the earth: "the time came to return his mother to the earth. He clears a small patch of field, sprinkles the ashes on the dirt, and plods the earth" "spadeful by spadeful" (80). When the doctor asks him about his mother, he says "She makes the plants grows" (LTMK 137). This oneness becomes; a pivotal in the novel. It alludes to the condition of the earth with man:

'Who were these vegetables for? Who did you give them to?'
'They weren't mine. They came from the earth.'
'I asked. who did you give them to?'
'The soldiers took them.'
'Did you mind it that the soldiers took your vegetables?'
He shrugged: "What grows is for all of us. We are all the children of the earth." (LTMK 139)

III. Life and Times of Michael K: An Ecofictional Text

Fiction has its limitations, and within such limitations those fictions it deals with environmental issues or the relationship between human beings and the physical environment is called "ecofiction". Any work of art has its own limitations regarding form and technique. There is no particular definition of ecofiction. It is usually spelled as one word, but sometimes hyphenated or split into two words: "eco-fiction" and "eco fiction." The terms "environmental fiction", "green fiction" and "nature-oriented fiction" can be collectively called "ecofiction". Considering the persistent popularity of fiction, ecofiction can be a suitable medium to introduce ecological thinking and environmental issues to the common reader as well as literary critic. As fiction is far more popular than nature writing, this could be the best possible way to introduce ecological thinking to the common reader. The basic difference between fiction and nature writing is that in the latter writers report from the field. Whereas many works of fiction evoke the ecological issues deliberately or intuitively within the structure of a story which is visible to the common eyes (Seaman 1). According to Diane Ackerman, "Often in fiction nature has loomed as a monstrous
character an adversary dishing out retribution for moral slippage, or as a nightmare region of chaos and horror where fanged beasts crouch ready to attack. But, sometimes it beckons as a zone of magic, mysticism, inspiration and holy conversion" (Ackerman 3). A writer like Coetzee deals with ecological concerns effectively in his fictions. His art is moving, vivid and often disturbing because of his treatment of reality. Understanding such contours of Ecofiction, *Life and Times of Michael K* can be read as an ecofictional text, because of its multidimensional ecological voices and environmental ethics. Ecological concerns do not only imply the need to preserve nature but also to reflect on different ecological values and ethical stances. *Life and Times of Michael K* is one of those novels set in the mood of different attitude toward the questions regarding "life" and "universe".

This could be one way to understand the non-human environment more intimately, giving the "self" to "other". The likening between Michael K as solitary, as isolated, and the earth as the same is to understand the problem of ecology more effectively. The intimacy that Michael K shows to his surroundings is crucial to ecological discourse. Michael K as a metaphor for the earth also states that living beings exist only in relation to each other. They also exist as a part of a complex nonliving material order. Ecological understanding realizes that humans are organisms interacting constantly with the environment. And this environment involves all species and elemental matter. Donald Worster significantly says:

Modern knowledge reveals that living nature, for all this private individualistic strivings, works by the principle of interdependency. Indeed, it can work only by that principle: no species, plant or animal, no person in society, has any chance of surviving without the energy or aid of others. This is not simply the discovery of today's natural science; however, it was also the discovery of the earliest cultures we know about. All the changes we can find in civilization, it is now clear, are only changes in the patterns of this interdependency, not in the reality or necessity of interdependency itself (Worster 78-9).

As a character in a narrative, Michael K engages in a sentimental attachment to the earth and demonstrates the relationship between the two. It also reveals that in order to understand ecological problems one need not be theoretically aware, what is more important is one's consciousness towards the surroundings, towards the nonhuman environment. Michael K has no special knowledge of plants or farming, but he knows the importance of existence and
believes "there is nothing to be ashamed of in being simple" (LTMK 182). In Life and Times of Michael K., Coetzee deploys these strategies creating an ecofictional narrative to bring 'eco-consciousness' on the same level as much political such as race and war. In Coetzee's narrative, Michael K becomes a symbol of simplicity, "evading the peace and the war, skulking in the open where no one dreamed of looking, have managed to live in the old way, drifting through time, observing the seasons, no more trying to change the course of history than a grain of sand does" (LTMK 152).

IV. Language and Nonhuman Environment

One of the prominent features of J.M. Coetzee's works is the issue of language. Although each novel exhibits unique characteristics, yet, in most of his texts the author investigates the role of language for different purposes and motives. Language becomes a tool to reconsider the constitution of identity, whether individual or racial, the relationship of master and slave in different political, historical and social contexts. The role of language in Life and Times of Michael K is allegorical and symbolic. The intensity of Michael K's suffering in a war ridden situation of Post-Apartheid South Africa has not been communicated through spoken words, but also through silence: "He is like a stone, a pebble that, having lain around quietly minding its own business since the dawn of time ..." (135). It becomes a metaphor for mute nature. On the one hand, the narrative of Life and Times of Michael K signifies silence as a powerful medium to question the colonial authority over the marginal and proletariat Michael K. On the other, Michael K's silence can be read as earth's suffering (May 71). His suffering, his inability to communicate, and the absence of language resonate with the non-human nature's lack of linguistic code. Earth does not have any language as compared to human beings' mode of communication. But it has responses in non-human environment represented in climate change, endangering survival of certain species etc.

Regarding the lack of linguistic code one can consider the case of subaltern people. They have their own language, but in spite of it they were subjugated by the dominant class. Their discourse has been marginalized against the discourse of the dominant power. They were unheard until any human being as medium has spoken for them. Similarly, in any ecological condition only human beings can speak for non-human environment. The analogy may seem abrupt but, if one thinks of the condition of the subaltern people and the contemporary condition of non-human environment in a parallel line of suffering, one can see that the problem is the same. The argument is, if language for the subaltern can acquire legitimacy in social and
narrative discourses, one can legitimize a discourse for non-human environment as an imperative. Absence of language in the natural and animal world resulted in the supremacy of human beings over them. They are subjugated as subaltern people are subjugated by the dominant class (Love 81). Non-human nature lives, it takes food in its own way, it also feels pain as we feel it, and it has its own way of communication. But human beings fail to understand their system.

The characterization of Michael K, a hare-lip, strangely disfigured, voiceless, colored man of thirty one as well as his sufferings at the hands of an indifferent society becomes a metaphor for the earth. As the earth has no language of its own, it depends on the human being for any occurrence of its subjectivity. Michael K's suffering mainly occurs because of his tenuous nature to grasp language. The physical characterization of Michael K also alludes to the fact that he has nothing much to do with words. His physical inability becomes symbolic to that of earth. The midwife says to his mother "you should be happy, they bring luck to the house hold" (LTMK 3). The meaning of "house hold" here is not limited to the literal meaning, but in the sense of earth as a 'household'. He embraces the earth, he lives underground, and digs a burrow like an earth worm. He says:

I am more like an earth worm, he thought. Which is also a kind of gardener. Or a mole, also a gardener, that does not tell stories because it lives in silence. But a mole or an earthworm on a cement floor? He tried to relax his body inch by inch, as he had once known how to do. At least, he thought, at least I have not been clever, and come back to Sea Point full of stories of how they beat me in the camps till I was thin as a rake and simple in the head. I was mute and stupid in the beginning. I will be mute and stupid at the end. There is nothing to be ashamed of being in simple. They were locking up simpletons before they locked up anyone else. (LTMK 182)

The non-human environment does not have any language to communicate any need or suffering. Similarly Michael K's claim as an earth worm destabilizes human being's ego of superiority and becomes a symbol of "eco-consciousness" (Love 3). The narrative, thus, asks for an alternative approach towards non-human environment:

He had become so much a creature of twilight and night that daylight hurts his eyes. He no longer needed to keep to paths in his movements around the dam. A sense less of sight than of touch, the pressure of presence upon his eyeballs and the skin of his face, warned him of any obstacle. He remained unfocused for hours on end like those of a blind person. He is like a stone, a pebble that, having lain around quietly minding
its own business since the dawn of the time, is now suddenly picked up and tossed randomly from hand to hand. A hard little stone, barely aware of its surroundings, enveloped in itself and its interior life. He passes through these institutions and camps and hospitals and God knows what else like a stone. (LTMK 115,135)

If Michael K is the metaphor of land, then Michael K needs someone to understand him, to speak for him. The medical doctor in the second part of the novel becomes the voice of Michael K. Of course one can read the doctor's intervention differently. In the atmosphere of war and devastation, Michael K is always suspected, "other", and humiliated as an outsider. His "self" has been alienated. But it is the doctor who tries to understand him and tries to help him. The readers struggle to understand Michael K just as human beings try to understand non-human environment. In such, the narrative becomes a textual web. It breaks the boundary between "self" and "other", and the "you" and "me". In a letter to Michael K, thus, the doctor writes:

Listen to me. Michael. I am the only one who can save you. I am the only one who sees you for the original soul you are. I am the only one who cares for you. I alone see you as neither a soft case for a soft camp nor a hard case for hard camp but a human soul above and beneath classification, a soul blessedly untouched by doctrine, untouched by history, a soul stirring its wing within that stiff sarcophagus, murmuring behind that clownish mask. You are precious Michael [The doctor calls him Michaels instead of Michael], in your own way; you are the last of your kind, a creature left over from an earlier age like the coelacanth or the last man to speak Yaqui. We have all tumbled over the lip into the cauldron of history: only you, following your idiot light, biding your time in an orphanage (who would have thought of that as a hiding place?), evading the peace and the war, skulking in the open where no one dreamed of looking, have managed to live in the old way ... (LTMK I52)

Michael K has been communicated as a metaphor of the land to the readers through the doctor. In other words, the doctor's voice becomes the voice of the human beings towards Michael K, who is a metaphor for earth. The narrative of *Life and Times of Michael K* deconstructs the human non-human boundary by attributing to Michael K the features of the earth, "a state of life in death or death in life....Into the shape of a rudimentary man ... a genuine little man of the earth... bent for a life of burrowing, a creature that spends its waking life stooped over the soil ... draws the heavy earth over its head like a blanket... far away the grinding of the wheels of history continues" (LTMK 159,161). Doctor's voice becomes crucial and
becomes the author's voice. Coetzee's narrative hints at a universal approach towards ecological issues. It suggests that such issues are not confined to any particular region, religion or society. The ecological devastation is a threat for all creatures in the universe, so everybody should be concerned about the matter (Attridge 86). It is true that the doctor is a white man, but the narrative of the doctor has questioned whether all whites are intentional. It does not really matter the whereabouts of a man if s/he understands the condition of his surroundings. To make this point clear a contrast is drawn between Visagie's grandson and the doctor. The young Visagie is a native but he tries to dominate over Michael K: "'You don't know who I am, do you?' he said, 'I am boss Visagie's grandson .... People have a hard time finding good farm servants nowadays.... Already it was hard to believe that he had known someone called the Visagie grandson who tried to turn him into a body-servant" (LTMK 163). Being himself a white African Coetzee's doctor became an authorial voice towards race and ecology.

I. Animals and Emotion

The narrative voice of *Michael K* also deals with other issues pertaining to animals. Animal issues such as "killing", "eating" and "lack of communication" have been a major concern in Coetzee's novel. Coetzee's approach to animal rights does not stop at animal ethics only. Animal rights involves theory, principles, reason, and speaking for animal. But Coetzee emphasizes that human beings not only need a theory or principles but poetry, virtues and emotion, as well. Coetzee's objective here is to give priority to the animal perspective. He is well aware of the fact of eating meat and human-animal relationship. Of course, there is a conflict whether to eat animals or not. The issue lies not only in eating, but what Robert Mackay says- is "to determine the best, most respectful, most grateful, and also [...] most giving way of relating the other to the self" (98). In his essay "Meat Country" Coetzee defines our perception, our linguistic cognition, and how to live in ethical relation to the "other":

> But we have not made ourselves to be creatures with sexual itches and a hunger for flesh. We are born like that: it is a given, it is the human condition [...] Asking whether human beings should eat meat is on the same level of logic as posing the question. 'Should we have words?' We have words: the question is being posed in words; without words there would be no question. (126)

Michael K idolizes the issue in his chasing of goats: "They have many thoughts, I have only one thought, and my one thought will in the end be stronger than their many" (53). He realizes that he
is superior to them. This realization comes from the conflict of killing that undergoes in his mind. The narrative of *Life and Times of Michael K*, removes the barrier between human-animal relationship to suggest that one has to adopt a new way of looking at the human-animal relation.

The problems and crises in non-human animal relationship cannot be solved theoretically, it requires the involvement of human emotion, virtues, and affection. Coetzee is aware of this fact, he does not deal with ideas only in abstraction. That is why without writing any philosophical paper directly on animal, he dramatizes and demonstrates them through human passion. Most of the recent analytic philosophers have acknowledged Coetzee's approach and termed it as "alternative animal ethics". A lot had been said over the ages, but the treatment of non-human animals remains the same. One fails to erase the idea of superiority over non-human animals. What one learns from characters like Michael K, is unless we attach ourselves emotionally to them, they will remain in distance. Emotions are needed for "understanding" and it can make things meaningful. The same idea is reflected in Coetzee's novel. Animals speak to us, if we perceive with emotion (Love 20).

II. Towards a Sustainable Nostalgia

Most of us, as current practioners and students of literary criticism, have tended to insulate ourselves from environmental concerns so long as they remain on page nine of the newspaper rather than page one. In the face of increasing evidence of our imperilment, we continue, in the proud tradition of humanism, as David Ehrenfeld says, "to love ourselves best of all" and to celebrate the self-aggrandizing ego, placing private interest above public, even irrationally enough- in matters of common survival.

-Glen A. Love, *Practical Ecocriticism* (17)

The term "sustainable nostalgia" is used by Jeremy Davies in his article "Sustainable Nostalgia" where he conceptualizes the sustainable approach towards a regulative idea for an ecological praxis. Davies argues that

what sustainability offers us is a way of being nostalgic for the future. The sustainable present will become our true home, because it is the point to which the future will always recur; we look nostalgically to the future because it is their present will be inhabited as our home. (263)

The present ecological crisis demands morally responsible ways of living, which is to live sustainably. A sustainable continuity helps to establish the pace in any given field. Any argument or proposition needs to be sustained to reach a conclusion. In the absence of such a conclusion, it would remain incomplete.
Sustainability is not the "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987: 43), but what sustainability implies most readily is not separation but continuity, the keeping of things as they are and the dimension of otherness of the future (Davies 265). In a sustainable life, one engages with oneself to produce the most essential features of life indefinitely. It is not the case that sustainability is only concerned with the rights of the unborn but it seeks to enable us to predict and determine the future. Sustainability conceptualizes a kind of 'memory-work' which offers a new way to think about it. The perception of sustainability is nostalgia for the future. Davies maintains:

For now, though we in the present must look nostalgically to the future, because it is in the future that the present will be inhabited as our home. The sustainable present becomes the end-point of the future life that will validate our own by coinciding with it. Living sustainably, we will use our resources in a new way that will let us experience them as intuitively familiar and not compromised by the passing of time. The emotional appeal of sustainability is precisely that of coming home. (264)

The dream of sustainability, Davies further argues is nostalgia for the future. Its fundamental desire is precisely that which the nostalgia yearns for: a stable home, free from the loss of time. Such features elevate the protagonist of the novel to the level of sustainability, which is fused with the protagonist's nostalgic yearn for a stable home. Michael K's journey, his job as a gardener, his stay in the mountains, the camp, and the hospital are symbolic of his nostalgia for future sustainability. Thus, his indifference towards everything becomes a means to enunciate Michael K's sustainable nostalgia and a social program to protect the ecology from the corruption of our habitat. His sustainability positions itself against the regressive and arrogant economism that treat humans as the world's sole agents, maximizing the flow of resources from nature: "I don't need to eat all the time. When I need to eat, I'll work ... He had no appetite; eating, picking up things and forcing them down his gullet into his body, seemed a strange activity" (LTMK 85,119). Michael K's world revolves by the state power and anthropocentric attitudes. In such a case the solution is not only to reimagine the cultural experience of home, but systemic persuasion and restorations of its physical characteristic are also necessary. His sustainability offers a nostalgia for future where he sees the future with a teaspoon where "he brought it up there would be water in the bowl of the
spoon; and in that way he could say, one can live" (*LTMK* 184). His saving of pumpkins seeds attains the pursuit of sustainability and leads toward a counterproductive conservation work. It contradicts the ancient Heraclitean principle that everything in nature is influx. Michael K proposes the ethical notion of making the future in some way continuous with the present. He is very clear about what he does and what he does not. In this way K's approach to sustainability becomes "a way of reckoning with and welcoming the perceptual openness of complex chaotic system ......" (Davies 264).

Michael K is not an ecologist, he does not understand mathematics, he does not know how "underground waters replenished themselves" but he has a nostalgic sensibility towards a greater sense that is "we are all the children of the earth" (*LTMK* 139). Thus, the sustainability that he adopts is without self-contradiction, and in this way his sustainability might become the perpetual openness of complex chaotic systems to unexpected new judgments and configurations.

**Conclusion**

Existence on this earth is not exclusively human. We are all aware of the fact that we exist in relation to everything in this universe. We cannot imagine the existence of only human beings in the universe. The problems or threats of existence in terms of ecological disasters that human beings are facing today can be solved through human being's proper understanding of their relationship with the nonhuman environment. As humans are the only conscious beings in the universe, the recent ecological problem can only be solved through human intervention. Considering the circumstances of the ecological world, literary studies need to consider the interconnections and the implicit dialogue between the verbal text and the environmental context. It is the most important function of literature today to engage human consciousness directly in a full consideration of its place in the threatened natural world.

In this circumstance, ecocriticism is developing as an important critical discourse to raise ecological issues to a higher level of consciousness. Ecocriticism continues to become a legitimate part of literary scholarship because of recent concerns for the environment. Since environmental problems are actually human problems, an important aspect of ecocritical writing should include analysis of human relationships. According to the ecocritics there is no single dominant worldview, no single strategy to evaluate a text ecocritically (*ASLE News* 6).

Ecocritical reading constitutes one way of making meaning of a given text. It can also be a means of knowing the intention of the author. It is now a common understanding that the author is not the transcendental messiah. S/he is very much a product of a particular
society, culture, geographical boundaries, and ideological observances. The formal structure and content of a literary work is embedded in historical-cultural context. In other words it depends on how the author chooses to give shape to his material. If an author is conscious of the importance of ecology for his work, then an ecocritical reading can help us track this design and motive. The problems of racial injustice, identity, gender justice, and ecology are not merely problems by themselves, but are very closely interrelated. In J. M. Coetzee’s fictional world, one gets a clear sense of the moral and political dimensions of these problems which are connected with each other. The moral sensitivity of Coetzee's novels is not merely a didactic feature of his fiction. It springs from the author’s awareness of the deeply conflict ridden inner lives of his characters. For example, in the case of Michael K, although it is known that he has difficulties in life under the apartheid condition, especially when his mother dies, we are not given the protagonist's mental picture. We as readers do not know what bothers him. Michael K stands at the cross roads of having to choose between primitivity and civilization. The conflict for him lies in his inability to reconcile with the demands of social life. We need a framework of moral notions concerning how human beings relate among themselves and with society and environment. A moral notion is something through which one evaluates people and things, as good/bad or right/wrong. Though literature does not give any methodological paradigm of one moral framework, one finds ethical themes treated in literary works with as much resonance as moral philosophy does. Therefore, fictional works can be a means of learning more about moral notions which help understanding ecological problems and the relationship between non-human and human.

Notes
1 Ecology is concerned with the relationships between plants and animals and environment in which they live. D.F. Owen in his book what is Ecology? says: The concept of the environment covers just about everything associated with organisms, and includes other organisms and the nonliving part of the world in which life occurs.
2 The most significant works of environmentalism come from Rachel Carson's Silent Spring (1962) and Al Gore's An Introduction Truth: The Planetary Emergency of Global Warming and What We Can Do About It (2006). In Silent Spring Carson argues for a cleaner and safer environment from toxic substances.
3 Lawrence Buell's landmark The Environmental Imagination, Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture (1995) talks about Thoreau's classic text Walden (1854). Thoreau is the only author of environmental nonfiction to have been admitted to the cannon of American literature. Buell
redefines Thoreau's canonicity by reconnecting the "order of the text" with the "order of the body" (Buell 373), and "Thoreau's importance as an environmental saint lies in being remembered, in the affectionate simplicity of public mythe-making. 

4 By Universal I mean an approach beyond any Geographical boundaries and that has to reflect on the better future of the earth.

5 See Glen Love's Practical Ecocriticism. P. 122.

6 By 'life' I mean life of Michael K and time refers to the particular time period in which Michael K's life revolves.

7 Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" suggests that the subaltern can not "speak" because in the absence of institutionally validated agency, there was no listening subject. There must be a presumed collectivity of listening and counter-signing subjects and agents in the public sphere for the subaltern to "speak."

8 The doctor in the novel is a white man. The doctor's intervention can be interpreted from a colonizer's point of view.

9 Utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham suggests that cruelty to animals is like slavery and he asks to feel the pain not the power of reason. The Utilitarian "principal of equality" states that everyone is entitled to equal moral consideration, irrespective of family race, gender, or species.

10 Analytic Philosophers like P. Singer, T. Regan, Elisa Aaltola, M. Midgley, E. Pluhar, B. Rollin, and many others have argued that there is lack of communication between human beings and nonhuman animals. Peter Singer uses Coetzee's example on the rights of animals, their capacities for self-awareness, and the ways humans treat them.

11 Meeker's book The Comedy of Survival (1974) is challenging a rereading of literary genres, especially tragedy and comedy from a biological ecological point of view.

Bibliography


الأنسان والبيئة غير الإنسانية:
دراسة نقدية بيئية في رواية جي أم كوتزي (حياة وأوقات مايكل كي)

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المستخلص

أن ظهور النموذج البيئي في الدراسات الأدبية بشكل عام مهماً في إثارة الوعي بالبيئة والإنحلال البيئي وباكره هيمنة القيم البشرية الرائدة. إن عدم وضوح الرؤية البيئية في المحافل الأدبية الرايزة تلمح إلى أنه بالرغم من وجود طاقات إستردادية، تبقى المعرفة شيئاً اكاديمياً في ضوء الفارق المعرفي البسيط بخصوص عدم الإدراك البيئي للعالم الخارجي.

أن هذه الدراسة تلقي الضوء على رواية كوتزي المعنونة 'حياة وأوقات مايكل كي' (1983) في مفهوم النقد البيئي، توضح القراءة النقدية علاقة الإنسان بالبيئة غير الإنسانية عبر استخدام مفاهيم الوعي البيئي، معنى المكان والحنين الملحوظ إلى الوطن. إن معظم الكتابات البيئية تستثني الوطن كموقع بيئي وتشتيت الفكرة القائلة بأن الأسرة تعمل على الأرض لغرض تحقيق الإنتاج الذي يصب في مصلحتها ومصلحة الغير.

أن رحلة مايكل، بطل الرواية، إلى المزرعة وبحثه عن مكان أسلاف أمه وعشيقه في أماكن مختلفة يدعو إلى البحث عن الهوية والانتماء وقضايا الأرض والهجرة. السؤال المهم في الدراسة .. هل يوجد الأرض؟ أين تسكن؟ تسعى رواية ميشال المعنونة 'حياة وأوقات مايكل كي' إلى تقويض السرد القطبي الذي من خلاله يكون المستعمر مفهوم الإنتهاج إلى الوطن.

يساور مايكل شعور عدم الإنتهاج إلى المكان أينما يحل، إذ يرى نفسه غريباً ومهمشًا. لا تنحصر قضية حق الأرض على المواطن الغريب بل تشمل المواطنين الأصليين ومثال على ذلك مايكل كونه مواطن أسود وإن مكان وجوده محل تساؤل كبير.

وأخيراً تُلَكُ الدراسة بأجمال ما تم التوصل إليه.