

Role Of Nature In T.S Eliot's The Hollow Men (1925) - An Eco-Critical Study

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Abstract

Eco criticism is a critical theory that has the center of attention to studying the relationship between literature and the environment. This research paper identifies deep-rooted causes that arise when society comes into interaction with Nature. The main proponent of this theory was Cheryll Glotfelty who was the editor of the famous book "The Eco-critical Reader". Ecocriticism is a neologism term in the field of literature. Ecology is the science of nature and its connection with humanity. It is a multidisciplinary study that focuses on sustainability and the existence of man. The present study aims to study The Hollow Men (1925) by T.S Eliot, which draws the picture of the hollowed world after world war. The poem under study has major concern for society and culture which are suffering from a lack of belief, optimistic approach, righteousness, ethics, and humanity. Humanity which is empty and corrupted lost its will to perform a beneficial part in the progress and preservation of nature. The researcher employs a qualitative research methodology. The goal of qualitative research is to clarify the traits of the subjects it examines as they are understood by people. Thus, rather than aiming to collect and analyze factual facts, qualitative research instead explores subjective experience.

Keywords Hollow Man, Eco criticism and Nature, Spiritual Ecology, Environmental Disaster, Environmental destruction.

Introduction

The world of literature is full of literary narratives dealing with the ethereal and authority of Nature. But, a major concern and threat to the environment, is the constant exploitation and misemploy of our surrounding environment. Humanity as a subject has recently gained the attention of many authors. This feeling of concern and its reflection in literature give birth to this new study. Class differences, racial issues, gender exploitation, and territory were the critical criteria, subjects, and ideas of literary and cultural studies in earlier centuries." A new hazard has emerged in the late twentieth century: ecological catastrophe, war of nuclear weapon, natural

resources which are more valuable to surrounding has been devitalized, a sudden increase in the size of the population, the proliferation of exploitative technologies, taking over of space in order to use it for the waste repository, pollution, and end of rare species (which is not a human problem) are among the most serious environmental issues that human being going to face in the coming century. The literary and cultural theory has started to tackle the topic as a part of academic debate and discourse within such a framework. (Coupe, 2000)

In a modern world full of mechanical changes, man is struggling for a balance between the physical and abstract world. This equilibrium can be gained when a man reconciles with his reality and that is his link with the other world after death. Man is searching for meaning as a transit between fundamentally opposed domains of reality and life. But conquest fails to give a satisfactory conclusion. This anxiety and conflict create an impression of the frustrated immobility of modern man. Human. Man after world war becomes worthless, as he is not making the best use of his abilities. The modern man does not have the ambition to acquire knowledge and wisdom to guide and leads others. He has lost the aim of life which is to get knowledge about god and the Universe. (Urquhart, 2001)

In the 1990s Eco criticism start developing as a separate movement, ideology, and school of thought. ASLE (Association for the Study of Literature and Environment) was a meeting house for Americans where they gathered and discuss their analysis on different topics in relation to nature. But later they decided to name this house an association ASLE. This association has its own journal called ISLE (Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment). The relationship between man and nature after the 1990s became an interesting topic for literary critics. Metaphorically this relation can be discussed in two forms: 1. man has an everlasting relation with his environment, he cannot live without it, and 2. now in modern times, it became the ultimate goal for humanity to serve the survival of Earth. (Tosic, 2006)

Thesis Statement

Nature and humans have an interconnected relationship. Nature isn't designed to be mentioned solely in inverted commas. It is a distinct entity that Nature and we can influence if we mistreat it. Nature cannot be reduced to a simplistic concept. Authors after the 19th century have shifted their writing style. They tried to represent their literary works incorporated with Nature. The Hollow Men (1925) by T.S.Eliot highlighted human dilemma, tragedy, and suffering after the war with examples from the surrounding environment. As men's roots are close to Nature, it is easy for writers to mention emotions, fall, hope, cruelty, death, and fear, with a metaphorical example from Nature.

Significance of study

The present research has theoretical and practical significance. This study is an attempt to explain theoretical knowledge and its relation to the environment as observed in The Hollow Man by T.S Eliot. What is society's attitude towards nature? This is a significant question for Eco critics. In a

broader sense, Eco Criticism encourages the author, and researcher to investigate the world around us and its importance for humanity. The idea aids in analyzing any literature by focusing on the author's portrayal of Nature and the text's Eco critical motif. Various questions, such as how Nature is depicted in this text, can be answered this way. What role does the environment play in the text's setting? How do metaphors and images portray Nature? What role do environmental disasters and crises have in popular culture and literature?

Research question

The present research aims to answer the following questions:

1. How does modern man interact with Nature, who by self is hollow spiritually, emotionally, and in religion as portrayed in T.S Eliot's *The Hollow Men* (1925)?
2. What is role of the man in the environment, is modern man a caretaker or destroyer of Nature?
3. How does nature interact with man, is nature empowered or oppressed?

Research objectives

The present study aims at the following objectives:

1. To highlight the interaction of modern man with Nature and the environment through the exploration of T.S Eliot's *The Hollow Men* (1925)
2. To explore the role of modern man, whether he is a caretaker or destroyer of Nature.
3. To explore characteristics of Nature as empowered or oppressor, when it comes to the interactive position with a man.

Theoretical Framework:

Cheryll Glotfelty defined Eco criticism as "It is study of the relationship between literature and the environment." But here, the major question arose can we call it 'Green Study' or 'Ecocriticism'. But both studies refer to a critical approach that began in the USA in the late 1990s and in the UK in the early 1990s. (Barry, 2017, p.248). Cheryll Glotfelty is an acknowledged founder of this term in the USA. The Eco criticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology (1992) was the first of its kind of essay which explains the relationships between the physical world and literature. It explains the close association between these two factors, how Nature affects literary people, and their perception of accepting changes in the surrounding world.

Eco criticism as a major concept arose in the 1970s. Most critics referred to this term back in 1978. William Rueckert, in his essay "Literature and Ecology," analyses the work of different authors on the basis of its relation to the outer physical world. As for its usage is concerned, it first appeared in literary criticism of related terms ecological. This was associated with the US Eco critic Karl Kroeber in his article "Home at Grasmere": ecological holiness.

Eco



Ecology

Criticism



critical analysis of something

Overall it gave us a simple definition that everything around us has a critical appreciation concerning ecology as everything in this universe is ecology.

The following mentioned characteristics have been observed in Eco-Criticism:

- How is Nature presented in the text?
- How has the concept of Nature changed over time?
- How can issues related to ecological crises be observed?
- How is the setting of the literary text related to the environment?
- What are the roles of men and women in the environment?
- What is the power hierarchy in Nature, and how are people and the physical world placed in that hierarchy?
- What parallels can be drawn between Nature, environment, society, and people?
- Nature is empowered or oppressed.
- All the values in the text are either inconsistent with ecological wisdom. It means the environment is established out of set norms, morals ethics which are built as a part of any society.
- Man has confronted relation with Nature or not
- In what way does man has disturbed relation with Nature
- Role of Humanity, are they caretakers or destroyers?
- Do characters peacefully exit with Nature?
- Humanity is concord or subdues relation with Nature?
- How do people relate to their environment?
- Identifies relation between man, culture, and Nature.

Nature and Culture

It is a crucial matter which highlights the relationship between Nature and culture. Eco critic believes that it will be wrong to say that everything is socially and linguistically constructed. (Barry, 2017, p.252). For Eco critics, Nature is truly an exit from its original essence. Nature is not meant to be mentioned in inverted commas only. It is not meant to be ironized by this means. It is a separate entity that can be affected by us, and we can also be affected by Nature, if we mistreat it. Nature, cannot remain to the simple concept we always perceive in our culture. In our discourse, we see everything is socially and linguistically constructed, but Eco critics put a question mark on this long-standing orthodoxy notion. Kate Soper frequently quoted remarks in her book *What is Nature? : Culture, politics and non-human* 1995:

“Humanity finds itself in nature, its identity relates to nature, and human undoubtedly belongs to nature. Nature is still in relation of exclusion with mankind from the very moment when a question raises about its separateness and its sense of belonging.” (Soper, 1995, p.49).

What do eco critics do?

1. They study again and again a literary narrative or text from the perspective of Eco criticism. Their particular focus is on one question, how Nature has been presented in the text.
2. Critics expand the spectrum of Eco-critical concept’s applicability by applying ideas other than those related to the natural world, for example, energy and growth, stability and instability, interdependence and mutual trust and cooperation, ecological and destructive, resources, energy, and its uses. (Barry, 2017, p.270).
3. They appreciate the writers who use Nature as the foremost subject matter of their writing, for example, the American transcendentalists, the British Romantics, the poetry of John Clare, the work of Thomas Hardy, etc.

Why eco-criticism as a theory emerges:

It has the following reasons:

1. Pollution:
 - It can be mental pollution.
 - It can be social pollution.
 - It can be political pollution.
 - It can be moral pollution.
 - It can be economic pollution.
2. Global Warming: Temperature is increasing day by day.
3. Overpopulation
4. Climates changes
5. Deforestations
6. Ozone layer depletion

Ecology studies the interactions between living creatures (the biotic component) and their physical surroundings (abiotic component). Ecology, in other terms, is concerned with living organisms in their natural habitat. Although it is not stated directly, ecology is anthropocentric. In contrast, deep ecology, which stems from the desire to support life as such, is bio-centric and emphasizes the reality that man is merely one part of a vast and intricate natural life in which everything has value. That is why man must recognize that he is neither permitted nor entitled to limit the diversity and richness of the living universe except to meet his basic requirements.

Literature Review

The purpose of the literature review is to contextualize and situate one's research in the existing body of literature. This is closely related to the research undertaken. It also validates and substantiates the research's argument on account of the correlation of the subject matter.

This part of the research is a brief survey of scholarly works done on the same issues by some renowned scholars and researchers. The reader will be able to understand the context and background of the study. It also provides us with what the purpose of research is. Many critics and researchers have also worked on a similar idea, but they have their own levels of interpretations in different ways. The researcher has tried to postulate and discuss a few scholarly works on Eco criticism, the relation between man and Nature, and related elements to the research topic. This effort by the researcher will reveal many unmentioned aspects of Eco criticism and the relation between man and Nature.

In 1995 Thomas Hardy was overwhelmed by the disaster of the world war and wrote his poem named 'In Time of "The Breaking of Nations" (1915). In the first stanza of the poem, if we do analysis from the surface level, it looks like a picture of a remote area where a farmer uses a harrow for his balancing his fields. He is performing his daily life activity. Ecologically this symbolizes new hope and new thoughts for the next generations. Where the same weapons have been used to destroy and divide other nations, exactly the same weapons are used for leveling the soil so that fresh crops are produced with the fresh essence of hope and prosperity. One way society is being destroyed through outrageous human behaviors against each other at the same time nature is doing constructive work through plowing in fields. As ' Dynasty pass' and nations are broken, the poet, \in real desperation, look around for reassurance that something will be permanent that go onward the same rather than the catastrophe of world war. (Tait, 2012)

T.S. Eliot and Ecocriticism

Eco criticism is an approach that provides social, cultural, philosophical, scientific, and ecological highlights for the study of any piece of art. In a research paper by Parashar entitled "A. Reverberations of environmental crisis and its relevance in managing sustainability: an Eco critical reading of T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land (1922). This paper was an attempt to raise consciousness in the reader about the environmental crisis, including Nature and culture. This poem explains the collapse of western civilization after world war. People with fractured identities were unable to connect with each other rather emotionally, mentally, socially, and morally. (Kim, 2022)

Wasteland opens with the following lines "April is the cruelest month, breeding / Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing / Memory and desire, stirring / Dull roots with spring rain." The first impression appears as a pessimistic approach to a month of the year, but deep inside, it gives us a view of the painful process of rebirth, a land will face after devastation or war.

Water is a symbol of birth, death, and resurrection. Where water gives hope of birth and revival, at the same, it signifies fear of death too. The Game of Chess in the poem the wasteland gives us

a view of the disconnection between humans and Nature. Organic Nature gives us life, and we are wasting it on inorganic activities.

Chaucer and Ecocriticism

Chaucer and his Prologue to Canterbury Tales, when we analyze this poem in the context of Eco critic point of view. It gives us the notion of sustainability in Nature. It also provides us a demonstration of how man is affected by Nature and Nature itself affects men.

“April is a beautiful month” why because it gives us hope, peace, and happiness. It blows spring song on our hearing so that we may get freshness not only physically but also mentally and spiritually. Metaphorically represents Nature has a positive influence on man’s development mentally, spiritually, socially, and in the environment too.”

In his article Eco semiotic. Sign System Studies North specifies that “the meaning of things in our natural environment were codified by means of books.” That is why spring in Chaucer’s Canterbury tale is a source of renewal and revival. While the prologue establishes Nature’s beneficial impact on people, the Knight’s Tale prompts readers to contemplate how humans fail to reciprocate Nature’s benevolence. Man abuses Nature for its resources in the fourth section of the Knight’s Tale, resulting in the ruin of a habitat where animals previously “owned in rest and pees.”

Wordsworth and Ecocriticism

Eco criticism evolved in the 1990s when critics shifted their perspectives to focus on the interaction between man and Nature while examining works of art. As a result, Romantic poetry in general, and William Wordsworth in particular, have become important figures in Eco critical studies. Wordsworth was a renowned English Romantic poet and a predecessor of English Romanticism. His ideas on Nature and man’s management of it have cemented his place as a key figure in Eco critical studies. His fame stems from the widespread perception that he was a Nature poet who regarded Nature as superior to mankind. (Bate, 1991)

In other words, his ideas on Nature and poems aim to heal Nature’s long-forgotten wounds with the intention of bringing man and Nature closer together. As a result, the purpose of this study is to examine Wordsworth’s selected poems through the lens of Eco criticism in order to illuminate the poet’s cautious ideas on man’s interconnectedness with Nature and to rid Wordsworth of the unjust title of self-centered poet.

The Hollow Men is a poem that explores human suffering, loss, and tragedy with an end in a land full of cactus. Courage is the significant element that is missing in people of that time highlighted by T.S Eliot in her poem. They are unable to take any serious action because they are shallow spiritually, and mentally. They don’t believe in positive values. T. S Eliot was always in spiritual and religious search. When he was writing this poem, he was not talking about humans who are hollow but the whole of Europe after the war. The lives of the hollow men lack direction and meaning. There is a lack in their credibility, belief, and intensity. They are only interested in

material and worldly things. Their prayers to God have degenerated into profane, distorted prayers. It cannot be stated that this poem is about people who survived World War. They are overwhelmed and burdened with remorse, guilt, and sorrow. They are baffled as to why they were chosen to survive. Hollow men have witnessed so much and are unable to get past what occurred. The hollow men are therefore caught in a predicament. (Singh, 2013)

The Hollow Men is a poem about the death of the modern man. There is the death of spirit, religion, emotion, and intellect. Modern man is so stuffed with nothingness that he even doesn't know how to pray. T. S Eliot's three famous poem The Hollow Men, The Waste land and "Ash Wednesday" all of them described men is moving towards the state of salvation. They are going to be spiritually infertile. (Hassan, 2019)

Research Methodology

In this research paper, the researcher has followed the parameters of qualitative research. It has focused on the poem of T.S. Eliot the Hollow Men as a primary source of data. This research is focused on in detail reading and analysis of the text of the poem. Textual evidence has been interpreted in the light of the concept of eco-criticism to reach the conclusion and findings. Nationally and internationally published journals, papers, and books about the shallowness of modern man which is represented by T.S Eliot are in correspondence to the research findings.

Delimitation

This study tends to analyze the poem The Hallow Man by T.S Eliot in the light of Ecocriticism. This research paper examines all the mentioned characteristics of Ecocriticism in the poem. Modern man is in a state of inertia. It has no shape and color. This research has a sphere of modern men's shallowness and its study in relation to Nature and the environment around them. Nature can never be in a state of inertia. Keep moving and growing is the foremost equality of Nature so that it may be got its flexibility instead of being at one stage.

Analysis

The Hollow Men is a poem by T.S Eliot about human beings have become soulless. They are paralyzed not only physically but also spiritually. They have no beliefs and no standard of living. They are leading a life of inertia. Poet is describing the behavior of modern men's mechanical mindset. He says that such people are hollow from the inside and their mind is stuffed with straw. They stand together with the hope to get help from each other. But in fact, no one from them is equipped with mind, courage, and spirit. Their mind is filled with meaningless concepts and beliefs.

"Their voices are like the sound produced by rats while walking on the strip of glasses in some dark underground room"

Modern men have no proper shape and color in them. They are in a state of inertia. They are spiritually, intellectually, and mentally paralyzed. Now they are no more in this world and have

gone to some other empire. From there the hollow men who are looking violent but in fact they are hollow and stuffed men, with no motion, aim, or courage. He mentioned that modern man is unconscious of age, and environment in which he is living, and the dangers that are hidden in the rapid, modern, and technically advanced civilization. This poem depicts how the soul of modern man inevitably becomes corrupted. He is leading a life full of emptiness, devoid of hope and meaning. It expresses spiritual deadness and despair. The narrator of this poem has only one question what is the meaning and purpose of life? What is the role of the man performing? This concept is achieved through the use of many natural aspects. The Poet's worry for society and culture which is devoid of morality, humanity, and faith is evident in the narrative of the poem. Society is pervaded by a sense of alienation and the breakdown of communication. He believed that humanity is suffering from a loss of will and faith.

As the poem starts with an epigraph with words:

“Mistah Kurtaz- he dead”

Death is the most acceptable aspect of Nature. When coming into this physical world he has to be dead to meet his eternal soul. But to take a character from Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness has itself an interpretation. He is dead represents the death of modern man after World War. He is unable to cope with Nature. Modern man is so dead that he is not even able to reward back Nature. Mistah Kurtz present lack of soul. A person who is spiritually empty. How can a person feel Nature without a soul?

Now here comes the second epigraph of this poem:

“A penny for Old Guy”

The fundamental principle of this world is aging. The second epigraph of this poem beautifully used this principle of Nature. One has to be aged. It is an allusion to Guy Fawkes who plan to abolish parliament. It alludes to real body lankness. It highlights the physical emptiness of humanity. Nature is full of many things to interact with, communicate and relate to. But when a person lacks its physical existence he also lost that connection with nature.

We are hollow men

When we give it interpretation according to Nature, it emerges as a concept of the blank. Like a hollow part of the tree, a depressed and low part of the surface which lost its beauty and attraction. After the world war, modern man becomes hollow like a shallow tree. Its presence become meaningless. When a tree becomes hollow it lost its worth. Same as the man of this modern world has lost his worthy identity. He is a major element of Nature and has significant responsibility for flourishing Nature. But when this same man lost his value how he can value the lost Nature?

We are stuffed men.

Leaning together.

Headpiece filled with straw.

The poem is narrated by one of the “Hollow Men”. Bunch of hollow men leaning together like scarecrows. Everything about them is dry like the Sahara desert. Why Eliot called them stuffed is because they are devoid of any moral, or ethical value. They lack wisdom, courage, and power in taking decisions. They need support like scarecrows so that they can survive. They are worthless like puppets and dolls. They have no will at all. They are stuffed with straws which means they cannot think and not even express themselves. They are emotionless. Man in this modern civilization after world war is so empty that they cannot build up a healthy society. Eliot's modern men look like scarecrows externally but internally they lack a state of contentment that a man can achieve through his positive and active role with Nature.

Our dried voices

As Wind in dry grass

Or rat's feet over broken glass

A voice like Wind in dry grass is meant to be heard less by people. This is the beauty of this poem, a society that has no strong voice suppressed by high voices. Man of the mechanical world is speaking to each other, but they are conveying nothing. A meaningless talk between Nature, society, the environment, and humans. We are builders of society. We are the protector of the environment around us. But men of world war become so weak that they are afraid to be getting heard. Wind symbolize emptiness. Here it highlights the empty intelligence of the most intelligent creature of Nature, "The Man." Wind in dry grass symbolizes arid prairie, where everything is undergrowth. They are partially dead and partially living. The hollow men are dry and dead. There is no blood in their vein. They are without any significant meaning.

Rat is an unworthy creature of Nature who is the symbol of purposeless life and directionless life. Same like rat hollow men are passing their life without any significant purpose and their duty towards preservation of Nature's beauty, color, and charm. These lines use the words “dry and dried” three times. It emphasizes that the hollow men have no blood in their veins nor do even they have veins.

The poet explains further that these hollow men have

- Lacking form and shape
- Without color and shade.
- They have force but paralyzed
- They have gestures without motion

Everything that has no shape cannot survive in Nature. Nature has the characteristic of being in motion and changing continuously. Everything that is not flexible enough to change according to circumstance maybe lose its existence like hollow men have lost theory form, shape, and color

after world war. They have energy but do not know how to invest this energy. They have crippled themselves so that they are crippling their surroundings. Hollow men are enabled to express their thoughts, feelings, and emotions in that way. They have lost their identity. Force is the power to do something and move. But paralyzed force is a force where no one can move. All of these are paradoxical examples that have no sense in the real world. So they cannot do any action nor even can they perform a beneficial role for nature. This is a favorite technique of Eliot to juxtapose different ideas.

In lines number 13-18 of this poem, the poet used words that lost the violent soul of modern man. From far they look like restless people but in actuality, they are stuffed dummies lacking actions and activities. The “Direct Eyes” from the other kingdom does not know the frustration of a hollow man. Eliot is mentioning the dead, who have faced death with direct eyes. Direct indicates the positive aspect of death. Eliot refers to the idea of life in death for the hollow man. So that hollow man cannot really die as they are in between existence and nonexistence.

Sunlight on a broken column

The broken column over here is referring to the dead civilization of Europe, nature is a product of man, society, environment, and culture. Man is on dare needs to perform a significant role between culture and Nature. They have parallel relations. Culture taught us to be the preserver of Nature and the environment for our own survival.

Conclusion

So the conclusion of the research is about the literary text is one that simply uses Nature as a subject of consideration and concern. There are no universally accepted models that need to follow while analyzing text from an Eco critic's point of view. As a result, Eco criticism, which was once associated with American nature writings and British Romantic literature, is now associated with global eco-literature. In light of the current global ecological catastrophe, it has shifted color from local to global perspectives. Repetitions of the words like “hollow” and “stuffed” enforce the concept of lack and emptiness. Man of this century needs to be active and productive. They should not spend their life meaningless. T.S Eliot in the poem under study constantly focuses on the value of man after the disaster of war inflicted on their mind. Man becomes a pathetic soul who has no guts and who now have absolutely nothing. Humans have just one planet on which to survive, and we are on the verge of extinction unless we take care of the blue planet. If we want to hear the earth's singing, we must immediately shift our anthropocentric perspective. Environmental perspectives abound in world literature. All major canonical literature emphasizes the importance of the environment as an essential aspect of human culture.

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