

# Nature In Narration: An Ecological Re-Reading Of The Human-Environmental Inter-Relationship In The Scarlet Letter

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## ABSTRACT

This article explores the relationship between Hawthorne's characters and the non human natural environment, from an ecological perspective, in order to explore the author's employment and understanding of the natural world, in *The Scarlet Letter*. Based on Edward O. Wilson's theory of Biophilia, the study is an attempt to investigate a classical text from an eco-conscious perspective, rather than the ego-conscious perspectives, through which it has previously been analyzed and viewed. By understanding the novelist's employment of the natural world, this researcher believes, one could assess Hawthorne's own idea of nature, his understanding of the pioneers' relationship with the vast American wilderness, and most importantly, his view of an ideal human-environmental interrelationship. The results of the study indicate that not only do Hawthorne's characters perceive and respond differently towards their environment; the response of the external environment is also selective, rather than collective, towards different characters. The biophilic characters, in the novel, on account of their affinity with their environment, enjoy a symbiotic relationship and, therefore, tend to survive and last longer than the biophobic characters, which, on account of their bio-phobic tendencies, manifest signs of death and decay.

**Keywords:** Nature, Eco-conscious, Biophilia, Biophobia, Ecological, Ecocriticism, Environment, Evolutionary Psychology, Wilderness, Ego-conscious

## INTRODUCTION

Set in an obscure little puritan town, situated on the outskirts of a vast wilderness, *The Scarlet Letter* details the arrival and subsequent settlement of a pioneer puritan community to form a new colony on a virgin soil. Along with its

social, political, religious and moral themes, the novel is an account of the ecological interaction between the earliest puritan settlers and the vast wilderness of the New World. The surrounding wilderness, in the novel, is portrayed as responsible for, as well as responsive to, the

actions of the people in the town. Thus, in the novel, the social and the natural, the human and the non-human, the floral and the faunal, the plot and the setting, the foreground and the background, all appear to coordinate in an intricately interconnected network of actions and reactions that seem to be happening at both natural and social levels, simultaneously. Such intricate levels of interconnections, between the human and the non-human, the social and the natural and the plot and the setting seem to offer an exciting opportunity, for an eco-conscious reader, to explore the novel from a perspective which values the natural over the social, the non-human over the human and the setting over the plot.

An eco-conscious perspective, as Glen A. Love remarks, “requires us to take the nonhuman world as seriously as previous modes of criticism have taken the human realm of society and culture (Love, 2003, p.47). Eco-criticism reverses the dominant contemporary critical practices by trying to bring back nature from the “critical margins to the critical center.” On an ethical level, as Huber Zapf has put it, “eco-criticism strives for the revision of an anthropocentric cultural value system, which not only involves the recognition of the dignity and independent value of nonhuman nature, but turns it in some respects into a source of cultural values” (2006, p.51). It provides us with knowledge of how our attitudes, race, class, gender, age, nationality and geographical location can impact our understanding and treatment of the natural environment. “We carry minds,” as Cartin Gersdorf and Sylvia Mayer remind us, “full of cultural values, norms, and attitudes that inform the ways in which we see, know, represent, inhabit, and, ultimately, reconstruct nature” (2006, p. 14).

If the ethical aim of eco-criticism is to restore the sanctity and dignity of nature, as an independent entity, it follows that the study of an author’s employment of the natural world and its

involvement with the lives of his characters could also safely fall within the sphere of eco-criticism. By understanding the author’s employment of the natural world and its relationship with the human characters, one could assess the author’s own idea of nature and his views of an ideal human environmental interrelationship. The present work, therefore, takes for its analysis, the employment and treatment of the natural environment, in a classical American novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, from an ecological perspective. An analysis of this sort enables a researcher to recapitulate the human environmental interrelationship, in a work of fiction, from the eco-conscious perspective of a contemporary reader, living in an age of environmental loss, in order to trace the roots of, and possibly the solutions to, the contemporary ecological concerns, in classical texts. The researcher finds it of particular interest to note how the social, moral, religious and political ideas of the people influence their treatment of each other and their natural environment.

Eco-criticism takes the natural environment as a priori and studies the human affairs and concerns only in relation to it. “Its strategy seems to be, as Peter Berry (2002) points out, “to switch critical attention from inner to out, so that what had seemed as mere setting is brought in from the critical margins to the critical centre.” Thus, as an ecological study, this study hypothesizes that the natural environment, within novel, is not just a mere setting; it is rather an ecological whole, which exerts a powerful influence on the various floral and faunal species, which are the parts of this whole. The surrounding wilderness, in the novel, is not only responsive to, but also responsible for, the actions and reactions of human and non-human characters, in the novel. Moreover, the response of the different characters, towards this ecological whole, determines their ultimate survival in the narrative. The biophilic characters, human as well as non human, form a symbiotic relationship with

their environment and, therefore, tend to survive and last longer. The bio-phobic characters, on the other hand, on account of their biophobic tendencies, seem ecologically disconnected from their environment, and, therefore, ultimately, die and diminish. Such a holistic view, this researcher hypothesizes, enriches the scope of the novel, broadens the reader's perspective of the text and adds a new dimension to its interpretation. Therefore, this paper probes into the following research questions: How do the human characters perceive and respond to their natural environment? How does the environment, as an ecological whole, respond towards the actions and reactions of different characters? What is Hawthorne's idea of an ideal human environmental inter-relationship? The purpose to achieve the following objectives: To explore the influence of the nature, as an independent ecological entity, on the actions and reactions of different human and non human elements, to observe and describe the bio-philic actions of the characters, towards each other and towards their habitat, to observe and describe the bio-phobic actions of the characters, towards each other and towards their habitat, and to investigate the response of the external environment, towards the bio-philic and bio-phobic characters

As an ecologically enhanced perspective, the study is a contribution towards the appreciation and application of scientific findings in/to the study of a canonical text. Informed by the latest findings, in sociobiology, ecology and evolutionary psychology, about the human nature and its relationship to the external environment, the study counterbalances the various anthropocentric and ego-centric theories, which have been extensively applied to the novel. In an age of environmental loss, caused by the biophobic human involvement, in the grand natural order of our planet, such a study is contribution towards ecological awareness, with regards to other life forms, to which we are biologically

connected, through our evolutionary body and history. This study, in the same spirit, is a reminder to the contemporary researchers, in the field of literary studies, to reconsider their notions of art and literature as morally and ethically independent/autonomous entities; for nature may continue to exist, even after the demise of the homo sapiens, it will not be the same nature that had existed before their rise on the evolutionary stage.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

"Ecocriticism's future," says Glen A. Love, "is, I believe, encoded in the prefix eco" (2003, p.37). Glen A. Love's prophetic remark, about the future of all eco-conscious inquiries, sets a futuristic line of direction for all those who wish to pursue a genuinely academic interest in the field. Not only its future, but also the past practice in the field have not tried, at least principally, if not practically, to detach eco-criticism from the scientific field of ecology. Ecology, in its scientific sense, "refers to the study of the relationship between organisms and their living and nonliving environment" (Love, 2003, p.37). Thus, eco-critical practices, by the very nature of the subject tend to promote inter-disciplinary practices, in an effort to end the hard boundaries between the hard sciences and the social sciences. Since its inception, it has inherited a very strong interdisciplinary lineage from the scientific fields like ecology, sociobiology, eco-psychology, evolutionary psychology, geography and other related fields. Any form of eco-criticism will fail to impress the academic world, if it insulates itself from those working in the biological sciences. Just like the prefix 'eco' could not be separated from its name, ecological thinking will always find the primacy of the place in eco-critical inquiries in the future. However, such claims about eco-criticism, as a field of criticism, which has aligned itself with biological and ecological

sciences, needs a thorough investigation of the basic eco-critical assumptions about art, literature, human nature and environment, which eco-critics take for granted.

### The Biological Origins of Art and Literature

A potential line of division and a key site of debate, between eco-criticism and the rest of the theoretical world, is the origin of art and culture. Eco-criticism, under the strong influence of biological sciences, does not consider art and literature as isolated cultural miracles, unique to human beings. Unlike structuralism, post-structuralism and postmodernism, art and literature is assumed as something inherent in our evolutionary history and implies that the cultural artifacts, including art and literature, does not separate us from the rest of the biosphere, but rather connects us to it.

It was Darwin, the father of modern biological and ecological thinking, who first located the answers to our aesthetic concerns in the science of biology. He was the first socio-biologist who emphasized the impact of biological characteristics of *Homo sapiens* on their social behaviors, including art and literature. “With the great majority of animals, says Darwin (1981), “the taste for the beautiful is confined, as far as we can judge, to the attractions of the opposite sex” (p.104).

In the same Darwinian spirit, Bolsche, in his book, *Love Life in Nature*, calls our attention to the existence of a unique aesthetic sense in the rest of the biosphere. “You have only to take one look at this nuptial bower,” says Bolsche, “to become convinced that a direct esthetic joy in the ‘beautiful’ resides in this bird’s little brain” (1926, pp.112, 469).

Another philosophical account, which explores the biological origins of art and literature, is Will Durant’s *The Pleasure of Philosophy*. Much like

Darwin and Bosche, Will Durant proposes a theory of human life which is strongly biological in its cultural, literary and artistic practices. He links the origin of art and literature into the reproductive desires of animals. In his characteristic style, he writes that “biologically, art arises in the song and dance of mating animals” (1981, p.189). Since reproduction is a universal phenomenon, found invariably across all organisms, therefore, aesthetic pleasure, derived through art and literature, is also a part of the rest of the faunal world. He notes that “it is this subterranean river of the erotic energy that feeds the creative passion of the artist. In some of the relationships, it takes the form of a rapid development of sex and art at once; and from this union the romantic type of geniuses comes” (1981, p.200).

Ellen Dissanayake, in *What is Art For?* (1988) and *Homo Aestheticus: Where Art Comes from and Why* (1995), explores the biological origins of art from the view point of an evolutionary psychologist. For Dissanayake, a Darwinian species-centered examination of art “reveals that the aesthetic is not something added to us—learned or acquired like speaking a second language or riding a horse— but in large measure is the way we are, *Homo aestheticus*, stained through and through” (*Homo Aestheticus* xix, xvii). From a typical Darwinist perspective, she pinpoints the evolutionary advantage which artistic practices, in our evolutionary past, provided to its practitioners. She argues that a biological understanding of the arts does not necessarily rule out other perspectives but precedes and underlies them, providing a broader justification for their continuing relevance in human life”. A recent article in *Lingua Franca* on her iconoclastic work about the growing influence of sociobiology’s successor, evolutionary psychology, emphasizes the common interests of its practitioners with Darwinian precepts “that the arts are rooted in

human nature inflected by age and gender and that the variations among the human races are trivial” (Crain, 2001, p.36).

### Human Nature is Not a Myth

Another eco-critical assumption, which separates it from the rest of the theoretical world, is its notion of the universality of a human nature. Outside eco-criticism, most theories consider human nature to be a myth, a mere cultural and textual construct. Eco-criticism is opposed to this version of the human nature. Apart from the cultural and textual construction of our nature, it asserts that there is still something that we could call human nature. As, Peter Barry, has pointed out that “the fundamental division between eco-criticism and theory in general is the existing theoretical belief that everything is socially and/or linguistically constructed (my italics) (Barry, 2002, p.252). Eco-criticism, as Berry notes, rejects this notion of the social or/and linguistic construction of human nature and literature: “Eco-criticism rejects the foundational belief in the “constructedness” which is such an important aspect of literary theory” (Berry, 2002, p.252).

Thus, eco-criticism questions the notion that human mind is entirely a cultural construct. Matt Ridley, in *The Origin of Virtue*, compares such anthropocentric views about human beings with those “the same old defensive sermon of human uniqueness that theologians clung to when Darwin first shook their tree” (Ridley, 1996, p.155).

John Tooby and Leda Cosmides in *The Psychological Foundation of Cultures* have identified the Standard Social Science Model (SSSM) of the human mind, considered as a standard model of the human psyche, in social sciences and humanities, as the root cause of all the problems. They have argued that the SSSM regards the human mind as a kind of “blank slate”, an entirely “social product” and a kind of

“an externally programmed general purpose computer” (1992, p.24).

The Standard Social Science Model of the human mind is also contested by Wilson and Charles J. Lumsden in their 1983 work, *Promethean Fire*. Arguing against the theoretical vacuum, which the SSSM has produced, they consider it to be the primary source of contention between the hard sciences and humanities: “non-biological conception of the mind is the primary source of contention between the two cultures, between the hard sciences and humanities” (1983, p.19).

Glen A. Love, in his *Practical Eco-criticism: Literature, Biology and Environment* (2003), laments the harm which such cultural constructionist views have caused to those who are working the fields of humanities. He notes that “in celebration of diversity, we have ignored how much alike we human are” (2003, p.61).

Thus, eco-criticism’s principal stance on the nature of human mind and personality safely separates it from the rest of the theories which regard human mind as an isolated cultural miracle. It propagates the notion that human beings are first and foremost earthly organisms and all their cultural activities are a manifestation of their earthliness.

Mark Turner, in his *Reading Minds*, rejects and laments the present state of literary studies by observing that “contemporary theory fails to connect with the full human world to the extent that it treats objects in literature that can be seen only by means of the theory: in that case, if the theory vanishes, its objects vanish (1991, p.16).

### Nature is Not a Mere Social or Linguistic Construct

The third assumption that eco-critics have tried to contest with the rest of the theoretical world is the existence of Nature, as a separate and distinct entity. Theory in general considers the external non human environment, which we also call

Nature, as a kind of cultural construct. Eco-criticism contests this notion to point that it is one thing to say that we make sense of the world or nature through language and quite another to say that there is no such thing as nature. Coupe, as quoted by Cartin Gerdorf and Sylvia Mayer, insists, “green studies does not challenge the notion that human beings make sense of the world through language, but rather the self-serving inference that nature is nothing more than a linguistic construct” (2006, p.12). The strong stance of eco-critics in restoring the sanctity, authority and independence of the natural environment is due to its strong commitment towards the environmental cause. An age, which has been threatened ecological and environmental disasters, eco-critics believe, could not afford to regard the external environment as a mere textual construct. Kate Soper, in her *What is Nature*, has remarked, “It isn’t language which has a whole in its ozone layer” (p.151).

Thus, eco-criticism, as Richard Kerridge has emphasized, “seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis” (Kerridge and Sammells, 1998, p.5) it has a strong politically charged agenda of drawing the studies of literature towards a more “consequential end”. By bridging the gap between biological sciences and humanities, it aims to connect us to our roots, to remind us of our evolutionary past, to make us aware of our responsibilities as earthly creatures, to this Earth, which is our only home in this vast universe. Joseph Meeker in his monumental work, *The Comedy of Survival*, adequately explains the true purpose of literature from an eco-critical perspective:

Human beings are the earth’s only literary creatures. . . . If the creation of literature is an important characteristic of the

human species, it should be examined carefully and honestly to discover its influence upon human behavior and the natural environment—to determine what role, if any it plays in the welfare and survival of mankind and what insight it offers into human relationships with other species and with the world around us. Is it an activity which adapts us better to the world or one which estranges us from it? From the unforgiving perspective of evolution and natural selection, does literature contribute more to our survival than it does to our extinction? (p. 3-4)

### **The Prospects of Re-reading Canons**

One way of doing this is to draw our attention from the current ego-consciousness towards an eco-conscious approach towards the literary texts. In this manner, texts are reexamined and re-evaluated in terms of their coherence towards environmental concerns. Thus, eco-criticism considers literature as a task oriented activity. By implication, it challenges most of the modernist and postmodernist assumptions about literature as an aesthetically and ethically autonomous entity. The project of eco-criticism is to transform our ideas, thoughts, concepts,, ideologies and worldviews “on how humans treat the natural environment and each other (Stibbe, 2015, pp.1-4). Our thoughts, beliefs, ideologies and world views influence not only influence our mutual relationships, as human beings, but also our relationship to our environment.

Eco-criticism’s highly charged political agenda aims to encourage its practitioners to pursue the task of environmental protection in a variety of ways. The loss of the natural environments, the misuse of earth’s natural environment, the



constant rise of the sea levels, the melting of the glaciers, untapped carbon emission, devastating floods, the outbreak of epidemics, all these issues constantly remind eco-critics of the horrors of an impending ecocide. In such an apocalyptic scenario, eco-critics believe, the teachings, studying and writing of literature cannot afford to shut its eyes.

One of the best ways of creating environmental awareness is to re-read the canonical texts from an eco-conscious perspective. As Lawrence Buell has emphasized that “there is no site that cannot be startlingly and productively re-envisioned in a way as to evoke a fuller environmentalist sense of it than workaday perception permits” (Writing 22-23). In the same spirit Scott Slovic, has argued that “there is not a single literary work anywhere that utterly defies ecological interpretation. Re-reading of the canonical texts from the contemporary eco-conscious perspective has produced exciting researches. Joseph Meeker’s re-reading of Dante’s *Comedy* and Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* his *The Comedy of Survival*, Jonathan Bate’s re-reading English Romantic poets, from an eco-critical standpoint in his *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition and The Song of the Earth* and Karl Kroeber’s *Ecological Literary Criticism: Romantic Imagining and the Biology of Mind*, Louise Westling’s eco-feminist reinterpretation of classical American fiction in *The Green Breast of the New World*.

Regarding the re-reading of the canonical texts, Peter Barry (200) points out that “it is just a matter of approaching perhaps a very familiar text with a new dimension, a dimension which has perhaps always hovered about the text, but without ever receiving our full attention before” (p.258). It is like re-reading a text from a perspective, which the traditional readings have ignored or over looked, on account of their focus on the human issues, which were deemed more

worthy of critical attention. He further adds that the strategy of applying eco-critical lens is to “switch critical attention from inner to outer, so that what had seemed mere ‘setting’ is brought from critical margins to the critical centre (p.259).

Keeping in view the above mentioned foundational books, this researcher aims to re-evaluate and re-interpret, Hawthorne’s most celebrated novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, from a contemporary eco-conscious perspective. Of particular relevance, from an eco-conscious perspective is the way the novelist the external environment responds towards the actions and reactions of various characters. The novel presents itself as a classic example of the relationship between the earliest settlers with the vast wilderness of the New World. By exploring the relationship between the characters and their environment, from an eco-conscious perspective, one could assess not only Hawthorne’s idea of wilderness but also his view of an ideal human-environmental inter-relationship. The present researcher believes that the novel needs a full eco-conscious effort to unearth the impact of the surrounding wilderness on the lives of the characters and the impact of the characters actions on the natural environment of the place.

## METHODOLOGY

### Theoretical Framework

Eco-criticism is, as Peter Barry (2002) puts it, a “diverse biosphere” which lacks a “widely known set of assumptions, procedure and doctrines” (p.248). Slovic, as quoted in Coup, asserts that “There is no single, dominant world view guiding eco-critical practice-no single strategy from example to example of eco-critical writing or teaching” (p.160). Buell notes that “the phenomenon of literature-and-environment studies is better understood as a congeries of semi-overlapping projects than as a unitary

approach or set of claims” (2003, p.5). Glen A. Love considers the question of methodology in eco-criticism to be a “protean matter”. Such statements about the lack of a clear methodology often weaken the theoretical foundations of the subject. Louise Westling calls the field as “under-theorized (2006, p. 26). Eco-critics, however, have not only accepted the charge of under-theorization but have also taken it as a challenge towards the development of comprehensive theories in order to back up their critical practices.

This lack of theoretical backup is perhaps less because of the lack of sound theories and more because of the enormity of the aims and projects which the Umbrella term of eco-criticism encompasses. Eco-critical inquiries often make use of the scientific theories, terms and concepts, developed in the fields of socio-biology, evolutionary psychology, eco-psychology, geography, and other related field. This is, however, not an easy task, since those working in the field of humanities usually lack a scientific background and are, as Dana Philips has put it, lamentably uninformed in sciences and are not recognized a fellow workers by those working the domain of hard science (The Truth of Ecology, 2003). To answer such an allegation, it is to be noted that eco-criticism is not science, it is rather about science. Its aim is to end the scientific ignorance, about art, literature, human nature and its relationship with the external environment. It aims to bridge the gap between the social sciences and biological science by bringing the two cultures together.

Since the primary interest of this research is the exploration of the character’s adaptability or the lack of it to their environment, from an eco-conscious perspective, it is theoretically based on the Wilson’s theory of Biophilia, developed in his book The Biophilia Hypothesis. “Whenever people are given a free choice, they move to open tree-studded land on prominences overlooking water. This worldwide tendency is no longer

dictated by the hard necessities of hunter-gatherer life. It has now become largely aesthetic” (1993, p.110). Of particular theoretical relevance, is Roger S. Ulrich’s essay, “Biophilia, Biophobia and the Natural Landscape,” included in part two of The Biophilia Hypothesis. Ulrich observes that “if biophilia is represented in the gene pool it is because a predisposition in early humans for biophilic responses to certain natural elements and settings contributed to fitness or chances for survival”. Ulrich’s essay provides a theoretical counter balance, to Wilson’s biophilia, in the form of bio-phobia, which is our innate ability to detest and abhor certain environments and settings. In one of closing essays of The Biophilia Hypothesis, “Love it or Lose it,” David W. Orr, concludes that we “must choose between biophobia and biophilia because science and technology have given us the power to destroy so completely as well as the knowledge to understand the consequences of doing so” ( 1993, p.417).

### **Methodological Framework**

The methodological framework of this research is based on Glen A. Love’s 2003 book, Practical Eco-criticism: Literature, Biology and Environment. The book is a practical and readily available guide for the potential eco-critics, who want to apply ecological and biological findings, as elements of literary analysis, in/to the study of literature. His method of analysis carries a scientific clarity and directs eco-criticism towards scientifically grounded arguments. About his method of argumentation, he notes:

It leads me toward ecological, naturalist, scientifically grounded arguments that recognizes the human connection with nature and the rest of the organic world and acknowledge the biological science as not just another cultural construction. (2003)



About the suitability and applicability of scientific theories in/to the realm of literary analysis, he highlights the basic similarity between ecology and literature: Literature involves interrelationships, and ecological awareness enhances and expands our sense of interrelationships to encompass non-human as well as human contexts (2003) As a scientifically informed eco-critic, his method of argumentation, particularly in the last four chapters of his book, assumes the presence of themes and motifs in literary works and then interprets those themes and motif, from the perspective of an eco-conscious reader. He says his interest in, and engagement with, “explore, from a contemporary bio-cultural viewpoint, the intuitive understanding of human nature that literary artists have always shown in their works” (2003, p.10).

Since every themes and perspective needs a suitable method, eco-criticism, on account of its project and outlook, uses only scientific terms and concepts, to interpret those literary themes. By doing so, it enrich the studies of literature in order to direct the studies of literature towards an evolutionary understanding of art, literature, human nature and our external environment. Therefore, this research first hypothesizes the presence of ecological themes and environmental concerns in a canonical text and then interprets those themes and concern, from the perspective a contemporary eco-conscious reader.

### 3.3. Conceptual Framework

The study attempts to explore, from an eco-conscious perspective, the biophilic and biophobic tendencies of the different characters towards their external environment in the narrative. It explores the characters’ adaptability, or the lack of it, to their surrounding wilderness; and the impact of this adaptability, or the lack of it, on their survival in the narrative. The biophilic characters, on account of their adaptability to

their surrounding environment, are conferred with evolutionary and survival benefits whereas the bio-phobic characters, on account of their lack of adaptability to their environment, fails to survive. The study notes the profound impact of the natural environment, as an ecological entity, which is capable of acting, reacting and even affecting the whole course of action in the novel. Thus, the researcher presume the novel to be an ecological microcosm, where all the character are caught in an evolutionary battle for survival, on a new found land, where choice determine their survival.

## DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

In the first chapter of the narrative proper, *The Prison Door*, Hawthorne’s omniscient narrator sets before the readers eye the impact of the new demographic changes, caused by the arrival of the puritan settlers, on the geographic and topographic features of their new land. The birth of their new colony is marked by the “fall of the gigantic pines and oaks” which were the natural and original inhabitants of the place, in its pre-settlement era (p.53). The fall is then followed by the employment of the abundantly available timber in the construction of certain structures, such as the cemetery, the prison and the scaffold. These structures have been referred to as the first human installations on a “virgin soil”. The narrator calls the prison as the “black flower of civilized society” (p.53). The new inhabitants of the place have been portrayed as an alien species of organisms, whose arrival has threatened the natural order of the place. Their new installations, such as the prison, the cemetery and the scaffold, seem to be spreading toxicity, death and decay. This is evident from the presence of poisonous herbs and plants which surround these installations.

These species specific needs of the puritan settlers seem to be at odd with the nature of the place. The “weather stains” on the prison’s surface, the “rust” on its oaken door, its gloomy

front, the presence of unsightly vegetations near its structure, its old and decaying appearance, seems to suggest the absence of any symbiotic relationship between the inhabitants of the new settlement and the natural environment of the place. The colony, as a whole, is biologically disconnected to the soil where it has been “planted.” Thus, the prison and the cemetery appear as alien facilities, whose sole purpose is to consolidate and facilitate human centered and human specific needs: “The rust on the ponderous iron-work of its oaken door looked more antique than anything else in the new world” (p. 53).

Apart from the construction of these human centered installations, the settlers of the settlement, aims to adapt the natural environment, into their own benefit, by changing the biota of the place. Instead of adapting themselves into the needs of the new environment, they rather tried to adapt the environment. This is evident from the introduction of the agricultural ambitions of the puritan settlers, which are based on the introduction of new floral species, regardless of their suitability to the local environment. In the governor’s house, John Wilson, a senior clergy suggests to the governor the introduction of the new floral species, on the new soil: “John Wilson .....suggested that pears and peaches might yet be naturalized in the New England climate, and that purple grapes might possibly be compelled (my italic) to flourish” (p.94). This statement by a senior clergy is evident of the settler’s agricultural and horticultural ambitions who wanted to naturalize foreign species of plants, at the cost of the indigenous species.

Nature responds to these puritan ambitions in a variety of ways. Their installations seem to be devoid of any biological and ecological connections to the soil. Apart from this ecological disconnection, the indigenous flora of the land is portrayed as resilient, stubborn and luxuriant, countering the designs of the puritans. This struggle between the settlers’ ambitions and the

indigenous flora is manifested at different places. For instance, in the first chapter, the prison is countered by a “wild rose-bush” which is rooted almost at the threshold of the prison. As a remnant of the pre-human wilderness, it has survived out of the “stern old wilderness” (p.54). As an indigenous and wild species, native to the land, it is blooming and budding with the countless flowers. Its youthfulness, luxuriance and fertility seem to counter the death and decay brought upon the place by the puritan’s ambitions.

But, on one side of the portal, and rooted almost at the threshold was a wild rose-bush, covered in this month of June, with its delicate gems, which might be imagined to offer fragrance and fragile beauty to the prisoner as he went in, and to the condemned criminal as he came forth to his doom, in the token that the deep heart of Nature could pity and be kind to him. (p.54)

Like the wild rose bush, in the governor’s home garden, the indigenous species of plants seem to be waging a war against the foreign species. The soil defies the agricultural ambitions of the settlers. It is wild in nature, and grows its own flora, resisting any human effort at gardening and cultivation. Even the earliest teller of the land had to relinquish his taste of “ornamental gardening” on this soil, which is hard and wild in nature:

“But the proprietor appeared to have relinquished, as hopeless, the effort to perpetuate on this side of the Atlantic, in a hard soil and amid the close struggle for subsistence, the native English taste for ornamental gardening” (p.93).

Thus, the soil is selective in response towards the different species of the floral kingdom. It is rich for its own species and barren for the foreign species. Despite the settlers' wishes, pears and peaches could not be naturalized on this soil and purple grapes could not be "compelled" to flourish. The soil refuses to be cultivated. It is wild in nature, since it grows its own flora. It nourishes only its own indigenous plants.

Despite the bio-phobic tendencies of the whole puritan community, Hester, the novel's heroine, enjoys a perfect harmony with the natural environment of the place. She is a perfect resident of the wilderness. In the narrator's view, she has struck her "roots" into the new soil. Unlike the puritan elders, the surrounding wilderness is a place of joy and relief for her. Once rejected by the society, on account of her sin, she forms other connections. It is as if the wildness within her is echoed by the wilderness without:

Her sin, her ignominy, was the roots which she had struck into the soil. It was as if a new birth, with stronger assimilation than the first, had converted the forest-land, still so uncongenial to every other pilgrim and wanderer, into Hester Prynne's wild and dreary, but life-long home. (p.75)

Towards the end of the novel, when she decides to escape the puritan settlement, she looks into the wilderness, as a place of potential escape, rather than the civilized continental world. When she decides to inform her lover, about the presence of her ex husband, she chooses the wild wilderness over the human town. The wilderness is the place where she gains her true self; it is where "the women" in her returns to her. The wilderness reminds her constantly of her own "moral wilderness."

Pearl, Hester's daughter, is also a perfect resident of the wilderness. She identifies herself as a part of the biota. Upon asking about her creator, by the clergy, in governor's house, she calls herself as "one of the many gems on the rose bush near the prison." Her inner wildness seems to place her in a natural relationship with the animals of the wilderness. The animals of the wilderness welcome her into their wild territory, and recognize in her personality a "kindred wildness": "The truth seemed to be, however, that the mother forest, and these wild things which it nourished, all recognized a kindred wildness in the human child" (p.161).

The harmony between Hester, Pearl and the wilderness could be observed in the scene when Hester meets her lover in the forest. Here, one finds the natural resources, such as the woods of the forest, as being employed, by Nature, in the service of Hester and her lover. This employment of the pine trees, by nature, is different from the one we see in the town, where we find a "wooden edifice" in the form of an "ugly" and "beetle browed" prison which is "heavily timbered" and "studded with iron spikes." In the forest, one finds the same wood as blasted and fallen, subdued for Hester, to find a moment of peace and solace:

But there was Hester, still standing by the tree trunk, which some blast had overthrown a long antiquity ago, and which time had ever been covering with moss, so that these two fated ones, with earth's heaviest burden on them, might there sit down together, and find a single hour's rest and solace.

The blasting of the tree trunk and its subsequent covering with moss is also a sign of nature's graceful and helpful decay of its floral species which, if left to the natural process, are helpful

even in their death and decay. The tree is overthrown by a natural process, its decay is giving life to the moss, which has covered and carpeted its fallen trunk, transforming it into a seat, for Hester and the priest, to find rest and peace. The pine trees, when fallen, at the hands of puritans, are used to construct the prisons and the scaffolds to punish Hester and her likes; but when they fall in the wilderness, at the hands of nature, they are covered with moss, so that Hester and her lover could find peace.

The wilderness is also a source of strength and vitality for Arthur Dimmesdale. It plays upon him in such a way the repressed part of his personality is brought into the forefront. Upon his return from the wilderness, he returns to the town as a new man: "The self was gone! Another man had returned out of the forest; a wiser one; with a knowledge of hidden mysteries which the simplicity of the former never could have reached. A bitter knowledge that" (pp. 174-5).

Afterwards, he does things, he had never done before; thinks about things, he had never thought before; and speaks about things, he had never dared to speak. The 'heathen' forest has an 'exhilarating effect' on his ailing body. He feels in his body "the exhilarating effect of breathing the wild, free atmosphere of an unredeemed, unchristian, lawless region" (p.159). The following night, he eats with a "ravenous appetite" and feels the night like a "winged steed" on which he finds himself careering.

Despite this deep and profound harmony, between the biophilic characters and the wilderness, Hawthorne's nature is neither entirely beneficial towards these characters nor do they completely regard nature as entirely helpful. Certain elements of the biota are seen by them as detrimental and harmful to their existence. Pearl imagines the pine trees as puritan elders and the weeds of the garden as their ugly children. The presence of unsightly vegetations near the prison

assumes a new importance when Hester considers the vegetable wickedness in earth's deep bosom coming to the help of Chillingworth. Thus, Hawthorne's nature appears to be a house divided. It is at war, at its own natural level, echoing the human conflict at the social level. His weeds are villainous and his herbs are heroic.

Moreover, the war, between the different species of the floral kingdom, seems to be in favor of the weaker, smaller and softer species against the harder, stronger and taller species. The blasting of the tree trunk and its subsequent covering with moss, the weather stains on the scaffold and the rust on the iron door of the prison, seem to suggest nature's harmony with the weaker, softer and smaller species. The defiance of the wild rose-bush, earlier to the gigantic pines, which had overshadowed it, and later to the prison, suggests nature's entropy against such species and places. Thus, Hawthorne's nature is a house divided, which is selective, rather than collective, in its response, towards the biophilic and bio-phobic characters.

The most decisive moment, with regard to the role of the natural environment, is the forest meeting, between Hester and her lover. It is the moment, which determines the whole course of the narrative. When they plan their escape, from the town, Hester's first choice is the depth of the surrounding wilderness. She sees the deep forest as a place of refuge. However, Arthur Dimmesdale, on account of his ailing health, looks towards the continental cities of Europe. Had they decided, as Hester had suggested, moving into the deep forest, they might have escaped Roger Chillingworth's wrath. This contrast, with regard towards the natural environment, between Hester and her lover, seem to add to the tragedy of the novel. Had he been biophilic towards the wilderness, they might have escaped their impending disaster. It was the priest's affinity towards society and civilization,

rather than the wilderness, which changed their plan, and made them victims of the villain.

## CONCLUSION

The novel, from an ecological point of view, is full of ecological concerns and environmental themes. It is an account of a community, which is divided, on the issue of their precise place, in a biosphere, which they have decided to inhabit. Instead of adapting themselves to the needs of a new environment, they tried to adapt their environment into their own needs. In doing so, they ignored that the nature is an ecological whole, of which, they were a mere part. Typical eco-critical anxieties arise with the realization that a time is so near at hand when the human acts may trigger, or should we say, have already triggered, a permanent chaos, which may wipe out the whole eco-system/s from the face of Earth, which is the only home that we have got in this vast universe.

Like the puritan settlers, in the novel, the contemporary world is also divided on the issue of mankind's true place on this planet. A very simple ecological lesson that one can learn from the novel is that humanity should adapt to the needs of this earth, rather than adapting this earth to their needs. We are earthly beings. Our first and foremost responsibility is towards the ecosystems of this earth. An ecosystem is a whole, which hold all parts together. Once the whole is thrown out of the balance, it does not just collapses on its own, but rather triggers a chaos which destroys all of its parts.

The novel portrays the ecosystem as stronger than the mini environment which the puritans have created for themselves within the settlement. The pre-human wilderness is fighting back to win over its lost territory. The rust of the ponderous ironwork of the prison, the weather stains on the scaffold, the decay of iron and wood on Hester's cottage door, upon her return from an unknown land, seem to suggest nature's disharmony with

all the man-made structures. On the other hand, the defiance of the wild rose-bush, which is rooted almost at the threshold of the prison, the over-growth of the indigenous flora in the governor's home garden and the under growth of all the foreign species are the signs of resistance against the settlers' human centered designs.

For a contemporary reader, living in a post natural world, the novel is a window to a past when nature held its power and glory. It reminds us of a time, when it was powerful enough to reclaim its lost territory. The twenty first century has equipped us with more powerful tools to destroy the wildernesses of the antique world. We are more brutal than puritan settlers' in the novel, in our exploitation of the natural habitats. Today, our nature is angrier with us than it was with the puritan settlers in the novel. Horrible rains and catastrophic floods, the outbreak of infectious diseases, nuclear disasters and the rise of cancerous diseases are the results of nature's anger against our human centered and human specific ambitions. Hubert Reeves has so prophetically remarked that 'man is the most insane of all the species. He worships an invisible God and destroy a visible nature, ignorant of the fact that the nature he destroys is the God he worshipping' (Reeves, 1998).

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