

**Earth had Enough: An Ecocritical
Reading of Halim A. Flowers's
*The Balance***

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Abstract

Past ecocritical studies dealt with the atrocities and abuses committed by man against the natural environment. However, the new coronavirus pandemic turned things upside down regarding the relationship between man and nature. Thus, this study explores the positive effects of Covid-19 on the ecosystem in Halim A. Flowers's *The Balance* in light of ecocriticism. Also, it aims to investigate human attitudes towards nature after the spread of coronavirus. The study is conducted within the framework of Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm's *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in literary Ecology* (1996). The study concludes that Halim in his poem introduces a new attitude to the ecoconsciousness of man. During Covid-19, the earth is given a chance to rehabilitate itself, to restore its life and breathe again.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Halim, Ecoconsciousness, Cheryll Glotfelty, Covid-19.

Introduction

In the ancient time, plague and epidemic were rather recurrent calamities. When plague spread, no cure could help, and no one could halt it. The sole way to flee was to avert contact with infected people and contaminated objects (Tognotti, 2013). The immense fear was also enflamed by a belief in the supernatural source of pandemics, which were often thought to be provoked by crimes against divinities. In the Bible (e.g., Exodus 9:14, Numbers 11:33, 1 Samuel 4:8, Psalms 89:23, Isaiah 9:13), the plague was looked as a kind of God's punishments for man's sins, so the terrifying description of its prevalence was interpreted as an alert to the Israelites for correction their behavior. This causal relation between pestilence and sin is also seen in Greek literature, such as Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* (429 BCE). Within the play's context, Theban plague is a sign of Oedipus' sin - a miasma which pollutes the whole land and attacks all life' forms. As with any disease, the cause must be specified and a cure sought and applied. In this case, a cure involves purification in form of death or exile. Oedipus' guilt is allegorical, and can be regarded as mankind's collective guilt (Keys, 1944).

In contrast, the Greek historian Thucydides (c. 460–395 BCE), in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, and the Latin poet Lucretius (c. 99–55 BCE), in his *De Rerum Natura*, refuted the plague's supernatural origin and focused on the depiction of the uncontrolled scare of infection among the public. According to them, plague did not distinguish between the good and the evil but caused the loss of the social values and a raise in avarice and selfishness. In Lucretius, a concentration is paid to show man's psychic degeneration. Acute anxiety was joined to the pain due to the spreading disease, whose symptoms, particularly that of severe burning, were both internal and external (Finnegan, 1999).

Later medieval writings, such as *The Decameron* by Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375) and *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer (1343–1400), emphasized human behavior: the scare of contagion enhanced vices such as corruption, greed, and avarice that paradoxically brought infection and consequently to both physical and moral death (Musa, 1982). Human reaction to the plague is also the central theme of historical titles like *A Journal of the Plague Year* by Daniel Defoe (1659–1731), a long, detailed account of events, statistics, and anecdotes regarding the Great Plague of London of 1665. Defoe introduces a realistic description of life in London during the Plague. He asserts that the plague changed life in London. The city was under lockdown. The inflicted people were locked inside their residence with their families. They were forbidden from departure under penalty of death. This caused death to many people who were locked with their infected relatives in the houses, but saved more people by avoiding potentially infected. Defoe confirms that the most common way of infection spread was by asymptomatic people who carried it. Those people had been walking destroyers, they had been breathing death upon others and even perhaps in their embracing and kissing of their own children. Defoe had a didactic purpose in this realistic account of life in London. He aims to create a blueprint that societies of the future can follow when face such dire circumstances (Keys, 1944).

Later in English literature, *Mrs. Dalloway* 1925, set in post- World War I, Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) described the permanent trauma of Spanish flu and of the war that succeeded it. "This late age of the world's experience had bred in them all, all men and women, a well of tears" (Woolf, 1925,9). The overwhelming agony caused by the death of many humans in a short time due to the Spanish flu, places the living people in a vacuum between life and threshold of death. T. S. Eliot (1888-1965) conjures the threshold atmosphere in his poem "The Waste Land" 1922, which is "in many ways a homage to the state of the living death" (Outka, 2014, 955). Like T. S. Eliot, William Carlos Williams in "Spring and All" 1923 is saturated in the atmosphere of mortality. He narrates the account of survivors from the epidemic and the war who are stuck in a state of a "living death", a state of existence in which an individual was not dead, but not fully alive

too (Outka, 2022). This experience could be felt physically and mentally. Surrounded by many dying people, the living one often felt half alive. Epidemic literature manages to evoke the zeitgeist of the moment as is the case with the Covid-19 pandemic.

Problem Statement

Unlike the previous epidemic, covid-19 is a global crisis. It causes death of millions of people around the globe and threatens human race. To reduce the devastating effects of Covid-19 pandemic lockdown is forced. Thus, humans' activities have been stopped. However, these measures have positive impacts on the ecological system. It gives nature a chance to take break to heal itself. As illnesses are a recurring phenomenon since centuries, the representation of pandemic outbreak has been a staple theme in literature. Poetry can chronicle the present and future situation. It can energize humans and modify their negative dispositions. poets can play a great role in helping humans grasp their problems and solve them. They can cure and save lives, because they are therapists of the invisible. Some critics read corona poetry as a healing therapy to cope with the experiences of lockdown and other vicious consequences of the pandemic. These studies articulate that reading poetry can help people to gain some sense of understanding and control over complex and traumatic situations.

However, this study explores the positive effects of Covid-19 on the ecosystem in "The Balance" in light of ecocriticism. Also, it aims to investigate human attitudes towards nature and environment and the interactions and relationship between human and his environment.

Research Questions

- 1-How is nature represented in the corona time in "The Balance"?
- 2- What is the role of Covid-19 in revitalizing the relationship between humans and the ecosystem?

Research Objectives

- 1-To investigate the representation of nature in the time of Covid-19 in "The Balance" in light of ecocritical theory.
- 2-To examine the impact of Covid-19 on man's reconnectedness to the natural environment and on the revitalization of nature in the poem.

Significance of the Study

Since it is hardly to find a research conducted on Covid-19 poetry investigating the positive effects of Covid-19 on the natural environment. Therefore, this project is new, interesting and related to the current context of Covid-19 crisis. It examines the revitalization and refresh of nature in corona time. The study can contribute to expanding new knowledge in the field of ecocritical studies.

Theoretical Framework

The study is guided by the philosophical and theoretical parameters of ecocriticism. In the anthology *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in literary Ecology* (1996), edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, in her essay "Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis", Cheryll Glotfelty introduces a concise statement of ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (xviii). The effect between literature and the physical environment is presumed to be interchangeable.

Ecocriticism examines affairs of connection and emphasize the necessity of promoting interconnection between human and nonhuman others. Drawing attention towards such issues acts on raising an ecological consciousness and uncovers the crimes committed against the marginalized section of the biotic community. Nature texts are used as a context by ecocritics for analyzing the relationship between humans and nature. Usually, the result is a critique of how humans destroy the natural environment due to their anthropocentric conduct. According to anthropocentrism, as Glotfelty refers in her book, "humans are at the center" of the world surrounded by all that is not them, the environment (xx). Thus, everything around them exist for their benefit and use. In his essay "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis", Lynn White traces many of the world's environmental crises to the Judeo-Christian worldview and its belief that 'God planned all of this [physical creation] explicitly for man's benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes. And, although man's body is made of clay, he is not simply part of nature: he is made in God's image' (Glotfelty and Fromm 9). Anthropocentric view regards humans as separate from non-human others rather than as interconnected to them; and it causes a senseless exploitation and hegemony rather than respect of limitations and subjection to natural laws. Ecocritics unite in denouncing the anthropocentric worldview, with its attitudes and actions. According to White unhealthy

conducts like anthropocentrism beget noxious actions, which in turn generate unhealthy circumstances for all life (Ibid).

Ecocriticism emerges as a response to the necessity of humanistic understanding of their relation to the natural environment in a time of environmental destruction. Environmental crises and infectious diseases usually are the outcome of humans' disconnection from nature, brought about not just by technology but a failure to realize the interrelatedness of all things including the life of the man as well that of the earth. Ecocriticism works to raise consciousness in an endeavor to reach environmental sustainability as a concept of conservation.

Ecocritics, as a group, support concepts like interconnectedness and interrelationship, and values like community and cooperation. Aldo Leopold argues that humans and non-humans are parts of what he called "the biotic community". He extends the community conception "to include soils, waters, plants, and animals": a "biotic community" in which humanity is "one of thousands of accretions" and species are entitled to existence "as a matter of biotic right. (Buell, 100). Ecocriticism aim was to participate in "the struggle to preserve the 'biotic community'" (qtd. in Buell 21) bringing consciousness to "the relational, total field-image" of "organisms as knots in the biospherical net or field of intrinsic relations" (qtd. in Buell 102). Glotfelty states "human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it" (xix). Life is interconnected on earth. In his essay "Beyond Ecology", Neil Evernden confirms that the "whole communities of organisms" can "co-evolve". "They are all quite literally inter-related"(Glotfelty and Fromm 95).

Discussion

Halim A. Flowers' "The Balance" is so-named because it signifies that "humanity and the earth are on the brink of catastrophic change" (Thomason 215). Capitalism has a significant role in splitting humans from nature. The deep intrinsic bond between humanity and earth has been broken as humans have stepped away from a natural life to mechanical life. Quest for material evolution leads humans to go through an essential detachment from their bond with nature. Their ecological unconscious is suppressed by industrial life and capitalist thrust.

The poem begins with, " Kapitalism has died / or at least stood still" (1-2). The visual aspect of the poem is significant. The poet writes "Kapitalism" with the letter "K" to link it with killing. This cue is a kind of reminder that capitalism kills the earth. He mentions "has died" with present perfect which signifies that capitalism died just right now for a reason. Its negative influences on earth have stopped. The poem shows that man's relationship with nature was based on merciless exploitation. The poet shows that earth used to cry because of man's exploitation but now she does not have to cry. She is dancing out of joy.

As the Mother Earth kept spinning and
moving and dancing For she doesn't have to cry as much anymore
The iron horses have settled And the commercial birds no
longer soar (3-7)

Earth is metaphorized as a mother who used to cry because of man's interventions and machines. The poem mirrors man's destructive and anthropocentric relationship with nature. Nature is regarded as a victim of "Kapitalism". In his essay "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis", Lynn White, Jr. assures "man's relation to the soil was profoundly changed. Formerly man had been part of nature; now he was the exploiter of nature" (Glotfelty and Fromm 8). The poet shows that human's unsustainable exploitation causes the suffering of the earth and the ecological system. All over the poem, a kind of consciousness is promoted toward significant issues regarding the environment's health. It shows that man-nature relationship used to be pragmatic due to capitalism. The relationships are monetized; things have been commodified. This summoned the ecological crises. William Rueckert, in his essay "Literature and Ecology," asserts;

We are in an environmental crisis because the means by which we use the ecosphere to produce wealth are destructive of the ecosystem itself. The present system of production is self-destructive. The present course of human civilization is suicidal. [. . .] Human beings have broken out of the circle of life, driven not by biological need, but by social organization which they have devised to conquer nature . . . (Glotfelty and fromm, 116)

The ecological balance is damaged due to man's unwise utilization of earth. Earth suffers and she has to fight back to maintain that balance which they have devastated in their quest for wealth. Though earth can be self-repaired, the continual noxious, unsustainable activities of mankind do not grant a chance for this

repair to occur. A required balance between man's consumption and the nature's capacity for renewal secures the well-being of man and earth.

Therefore, coronavirus has come to halt man's harmful activities and capitalism to save earth and to restore that balance again. During lockdown, people are locked at home and all their activities have been halted and natural environment has started to prosper. "Iron horses" and "commercial birds", which symbolize to cars, trains and planes, have been stopped which lead to halt their smoke and pollution. The stop of the causes of smoke and pollution gives a chance for earth to breathe again. The poet wants to show the readers another aspect of human domination on the earth. They raped animals' biotic right of existence. Earth became a space for man's machines, cars and planes, the biggest contributors of pollution, instead of being a place for animals like horses and lovely birds...etc. They raped these animal's natural habitat and demolished the green areas to establish buildings and roads. The poet criticizes humans' anthropocentric conduct and their role as "the rulers of the earth" (qtd in Glotfelty and Fromm 132), that gave them the right to control nature and reshape it.

Coronavirus has come to deconstruct man's anthropocentric conduct. It has locked him home to halt his destructive behavior. Once man abstain from suppression earth, natural process returns to normality. The poet gives an idyllic image of natural life as humans stop polluting water and air. "So now, the dolphins can play on the shore / of Sardinia and the filth has disappeared from the water of / Venice, along with the void of polluting people (8-10)". Endangered sea life returns to be vibrant again. Feeling not threatened by humans, dolphins begin playing on the sea shore. Dolphins being part of the natural world. They feel freedom. They are full of joy and playing with happiness and freedom on the shore with the absence of human disturbance. Seas look clean without filth again. Filth was not dumped into the water of Venice with disappearance of polluting people. people used to pollute the water. Thus, their disappearance led to the disappearance of filth and wastes.

During Covid-19, earth is given a chance to rehabilitate itself, to restore its life and breathe again. The air is pure and no more polluted. "The air" is personified as a human being who has long been suffocated by man's pollution. Now, air "can finally breathe", just like man, with the stop of pollution. According to Scott Slovic, coronavirus is an opportunity to develop new ways of thinking by evolving an awareness of the benefits of stop socio-cultural brakes (Slovic 2020, p.n. 2) and developing new ways of living to save the biosphere. It has warned mankind to minimize and correct their utilization of the earth to preserve nature for their own well-being. The poet enflames the reader's consciousness of the intertwined relation that connects humans and non-human entities in a greater 'biotic community' that embraces them all. In the poem, the poet asserts that the dolphins, birds, horses, air, and water are all partners in this biotic community and their occupation a space in this universe is a matter of right. The poem is biocentric and ecoconscious text, which sheds light on existence of animals in their natural habitat and coexistence and interrelatedness of all the organisms in the biotic community.

Sad that so many had to die
longer cry

For the Mother Earth to no

For so many to finally live

Matricide (15-19)

In a world protected from the insanity of our collective

Earth is metaphorized as a mother who is raped by human beings' insanity. All human beings are responsible for the assassination of the ecological system. The significance of the land's ethical treatment is crystallized throughout the text. Aldo Leopold's concept "The land ethic" "advocates nature preservation" (Buell 101). In his essay "The Land Ethic Today", J. Baird Callicott mentions Leopold writes:

A land ethic [...] reflects the existence of an ecological conscience, and this in turn reflects a conviction of individual responsibility for the health of the land. Health is the capacity of the land for self-renewal. Conservation is our effort to understand and preserve this capacity. (45)

The repetition of "For the Mother Earth to no longer cry" is to lighten the public that their unsustainable exploitation causes the destruction of the earth. Practically, an instrumental solution is "decrease of human population". Such substantial decrease in human population is required for the flourishing of both human and nonhuman life (Buell, 102).

Moreover, Man's life is directly related to its relationship with nature. Capitalism has played a significant role in separating man from nature. people often behave as if they are able to survive without nature. Nature acts as the major source of their life. It bears the ability of enriching their spiritual lives, health and well-being. Humanity's wellbeing largely depends on the biosphere's health. The poet wants to lighten the public that man's health is impossible without preservation of the earth's life. As the ecophenomenologist Neil

Evernden argues that the self is created by a system of natural signifiers. He says, in his essay "Beyond Ecology: Self, Place, and the Pathetic fallacy," that "it is impossible for man to exist out of context" (95). In a sense, as Cheryll Glotfelty illustrates in her introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), "there is no such thing as an individual, only an individual-incontext, no such thing as self, only self-in-place" (xxviii). Thus, the self is defined by the context in which it is embedded.

The poet gives a panoramic view of the members of the society during Covid-19 pandemic. As "The markets are closed", the "merchants" and "traders" are confined at home chatting about their financial losses due to lockdowns. They have nothing to do because their sole job used to be exploitation and destruction of the ecological system and earth for their benefit. These lines "The places of worship are empty and the callers to prayer / are silenced, forcing people to carry God with them inside / of the temple of their own souls (25-27)", give an image of places of worship at Covid-19 pandemic. People cannot go to the mosques and churches to do their prayers due to the lockdown. The call to prayers for Muslims can no longer be heard as well as the church's bell. Although it has been a painful experience but acts as a remedy to the worshippers.

The revival of the ecological system and earth has led to rehabilitation of humans. As Neil Evernden confirms in his essay "Beyond Ecology" by saying that the "whole communities of organisms" can "co-evolve". "They are all quite literally inter-related"(Glotfelty and Fromm 95). It has caused internal psychological healing for them. It helps them to reconnect faithfully to God away from hypocrisy and showing off that some people do in their going off to the places of worship. They are forced by the ecological system to carry God inside their souls and build mosques, churches and temples of worship inside their souls to worship God faithfully away from showing off. This is the real message of religions that humans should carry God inside their souls.

Furthermore, as humans stop their over speed of social and financial activities, and "had to be confined" due to lockdown the sun beautifully shines and the layers of ozone get saved "from the stratification of the mess (32)", from depletion. Humans are part of the ecological system but they are socially constructed. They do harm for the ecological system. "Now we all wear masks (35)" Thus, the earth gets the chance "to breath" and secures the freedom of all life.

In an ecocritical reading of the text, nature is no longer passive and destroyed. Nature is an active player in formation of the whole design. The usually marginalized non-human others are fetched to the center, and human, what was central, exemplified as a confined here. Their lockdown acts to purify and change them in order to reconnect to nature again. Their transformation from anthropocentrism to biocentrism represents their re-connectedness to nature because of covid-19. Halim seems conscious of the impact of human's activities on earth as William Rueckert in his essay "Literature and Ecology" says, "[e]very poem is an action which comes from a finely developed and refined ecological conscience and consciousness" (Glotfelty and Fromm 116). He aims to enflame public awareness through his poem. In his essay "Nature Writing and Environmental Psychology," Scott Slovic opines that "the goal of the writer is [. . .] to nourish the reader's awareness of the world" (365).

The study concludes that Halim in his poem, "The Balance" introduces a new attitude to raise the ecoconsciousness of every single human being of the necessity of rehabilitation to the ecological system. During Covid-19, the earth is given a great chance to recover itself, to restore its life and breathe again. The current study concludes that within the framework of Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm's *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in literary Ecology*, Halim's "The Balance" is a clear testimony of the increasing ecoconsciousness in the time of Covid-19.

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