

Signs of Environmental Destruction: An Eco-Semiotic Approach to Elise Thompson's *The Magic of our Lan*

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Abstract

This paper takes the idea of ecological concerns and aims to explore that how Elise Thompson addresses genuine issues such as deforestation, water scarcity, and climate change in the contemporary era. In her recent short story, *The Magic of Our Lands*, Thompson depicts a fictional world that paints the real face of contemporary societies. The tale is a satirical persona of people's desires to be modern and advance in every aspect of life. However, this modernism is maintained by eradicating the balance of the environment and misusing natural objects like trees. Thompson, to address these issues, aesthetically articulates various linguistic signs that need to be interpreted further. For this, this paper utilizes ecocriticism as a critical framework which offers a specific lens; eco-semiotic that belongs to language and signs. Hence, by employing an eco-semiotic framework, the analytical part attempts to analyze the linguistic signs embedded in Thompson's narrative. Moreover, the analysis reveals that Thompson, through her characters particularly Ella, criticizes the contemporary priorities of people and educates her readers on how to save and care for nature.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, semiotics, signs and symbols, contemporary fiction, environmental destruction.

Introduction

Our knowledge of ecology isn't enough to solve the environmental problems we face today, even though we know why species are going extinct, human numbers are growing, and trash cans are piling up from backyards to the stratosphere (Begon, 2021). To find a way to deal with these problems, we need to understand both how the environment works and how people act. This is mostly because, despite how important they are to everyone, we still don't fully understand or account for the semiotic parts of our interactions with nature (Barry, 2021). Eco-semiotic theory will be used to look at Thompson's story in order to figure out what happens when the environment is destroyed. The main focus of the study will be on the effects of environmental destruction.

At the same time that the environment is being destroyed, the magic of our lands is being destroyed. Ella is a little girl of twelve years old who enjoys listening to her grandmother's stories because they allow her to learn, experience, and observe the beauty of nature. The entire story revolves on this central idea as its primary focus. The stories that she tells teach Ella about the importance of nature, which is responsible for maintaining a

profound balance on the planet earth. In the course of Ella's development, she has witnessed a significant transformation in her environment. She has seen that humans have shown a disregard for nature by erecting buildings, industries, and luxury homes, which has led to a significant alteration in the climate. She starts educating people about the repercussions of climate change since she considers it to be a major problem that affects the entire planet for the better. On the other hand, because everyone is so preoccupied with material things, her argument is not taken seriously by anyone. As a result, the conclusion of Thompson's novel is characterized by a disturbing manner of environmental degradation, which encourages readers to act and defend the environment.

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the manner in which Thompson employs a variety of linguistic markers in order to convey such a true issue of environmental damage. The analytical component will make use of an interdisciplinary technique known as eco-semiotic in order to accomplish this. This study will highlight the broader expression of ecological difficulties and the activities of humans that have generated disbalance between nature and the environment through the use of an eco-semiotic analysis. Moreover, the research will underline the significance of environmental preservation and will bring attention to the concrete symbols and signals that are utilized in Thompson's story in order to address this issue.

Literature Review

Literature, with the use of sumptuous imagery and symbolic language, illustrates the environmental catastrophe that has occurred. Rachel Carson, in her seminal work "Silent Spring," published in 1962, makes use of awe-inspiring imagery to show the deterioration of ecosystems that is caused by the use of pesticides. In "A Sand County Almanac" (1949), Aldo Leopold analyzes the impact that humans have on the environment and land ethics via the use of ecological observation and personal narrative. Ecosemiotics was established in the mid-1990s as a subfield of semiotics to investigate the connections between human culture and ecosystems, as well as the semiotic or sign-mediated components of ecology. Some have defined it as "the study of sign processes that relate organisms to their natural environment," while others have designated it as the branch of semiotics that investigates "human relationships to nature that have a semiotic basis." You are correct in employing either of these expressions. Ecosemiotics is a subfield of semiotics that broadens the application of the sign, a fundamental concept in semiotics, from human culture to ecological systems, and more specifically, from other species to the human-cultured world. Ecosemiotics is "a branch of semiotics that investigates sign processes as the cause of ecological phenomena," according to one definition. This definition is relatively recent. Some argue that ecosemiotics is primarily concerned with semiotic processes that are either related to or pertain to the broader context of biological processes in motion. This is one potential method of comprehending ecosemiotics.

In the year 2022, Smith underlined the significance of narrative choices in terms of recognizing the emotional and symbolic implications that environmental calamities have. Story and point of view are two of the many narrative strategies that play an important role in the representation of environmental concerns. According to the findings of Chen's research from 2023, Thompson's story shows the degradation of the ecosystem by making use of both factual facts and metaphor. As part of her 2021 first-person narrative in eco-fiction, Brown studies the ways in which personal narratives in environmental literature mirror more general ecological challenges. As a result, she places an emphasis on Ella's trip and the broader consequences it holds. The study that Gonzalez conducted in 2022 on the decoding of environmental deterioration in literature sheds light on the recent significance of eco-semiotic analysis in eco-fiction. During the year 2023, Miller conducted an examination of the literary depictions of environmental concerns. When readers evaluate their own responses and viewpoints on environmental degradation, they are able to comprehend the impact that Thompson's tale has had on environmental consciousness.

Theoretical Framework

Ecocriticism is a critical perspective to analyze ecological issues in the texts. As a pivotal branch, ecocriticism provides multifaceted theoretical approaches such as biodiversity (Maran, 2020). In this regard, the present study will utilize eco-semiotic approach to analyze concrete signs in Thompson's short story; *The Magic of Our Lands*. Eco-semiotic conveniently blends linguistic signs and environmental concerns into a single perspective that means it offers a critical framework to study manifestation of ecological issues through the articulation of linguistic signs (Baranova, 2021). The analytical part will deliberately interpret and draw a discussion on the specific signs that address ecological concerns through the narrative. The main focus will

be on the signs and symbols that primarily denote environmental problems such as deforestation, water, and livings being surrounded by the nature. Moreover, the textual evidences will be taken from Thompson's original narrative like words, metaphors, symbols and signs. Then, the evidences will be analyzed through a critical practice.

Analysing Signs of Environmental Destruction in *The Magic of our Lands*

The protagonist, Ella, is introduced, and her deep connection to nature is shown by her childhood spent surrounded by "*woods and streams.*" She is very exacting when it comes to "*tree and animal.*" On top of that, she can understand and sing songs with the word "birds" in them. Through these messages, Thompson develops Ella's deep connection to the objects and nature. When she was little, her grandma would also tell stories for her. The use of the word "*fireflies*" in this context implies a bygone era of breathtakingly beautiful and unspoiled natural beauty. She can also hear the sound of river flow, which Thompson refers to as "*the songs of the river,*" in relation to these signals. Ella refers to this ecologically friendly environment as "*full of magic,*" a sentiment she has personally experienced in details such as "the first blossom of spring and the sparkle of the snowflakes." Therefore, in the opening paragraphs, Thompson intentionally describes "eco-friendly signs" that are not present in the narrative but are actual objects from the past that the protagonist learned to care for and preserve, and should be grateful for "the sun, the rain, the wind, and the snow."

Ella's early childhood was characterized by a plethora of opportunities to explore, learn, and experience the magical nature of the land. However, "*the magic began to die*" when she was nearly twelve. People's priorities have undergone a rapid transformation; they have transitioned from being singers of birds' songs to singers of material possessions. They have begun to reside in luxurious homes, as opposed to the woods. They have separated animals from their homes and relegated them to other locations. Electric lights have replaced "fireflies," indicating that nature has been replaced by artificial objects. The disbalance on Earth has been caused by the irresponsibility and disregard of individuals that modernism and the pursuit of advancement have fostered; "*Ella heard of floods, storms, fires, droughts, and one word that seemed to connect them all: climate change (p. 1)*" on the news each day. This was solely due to the fact that animals were no longer friendly, and trees were becoming ill as a result of the high temperature. The most alarming news in this regard is that this environmental degradation would persist if humans do not turn to nature.

After then, the narrative shifts its tone to reflect the uninformed attitude of people, stating that although there is a continuous debate about climate change, no one is taking climate change seriously as a significant subject of concern. Thompson draws attention to the fact that despite the fact that "*Ella even learned about climate change in school (p. 2),*" the issue has not been taken seriously, and nothing has been done to stop it up to this point. This demonstrates how silly people are because they have been talking about the destruction of the environment and are aware that it is due to climate change; but, "after years of warning from scientists," they are ignoring the most severe effects that will occur in the future. As Thompson refers to it, "Earth is sick," which is the primary reason for this severe climate change, Mother Nature is the primary reason. Through her explanation, she emphasizes that the reason we are forced to deal with environmental damage is because Mother Nature is sick. In addition, the symbol of "Mother Nature" demonstrates that every living thing has the potential to flourish when it is surrounded by natural elements. In the event that "Mother Nature" acts as a weak source, the influence will be imposed upon the inhabitants of the area. Furthermore, as a result of the activities of humans, all living things are forced to strive for life; Ella's mother warns her that "nature would be mad at people for not being kind."

In the years that Ella has spent growing up, she has observed first-hand the "forest" being cleared away and "uniform modular houses" being constructed in its place. The term "forest" refers to the natural environment in which all inhabitants, including trees, birds, flowers, and flies, coexist. On the other hand, the term "modular houses" refers to the human dependence on material objects that cannot be compared to nature by any means. When it comes to the loss of the forest, which Thompson refers to as "the loss of a friend," the scientist who preaches about care for nature has the same pain that Ella does. In this passage, Thompson makes advantage of a fundamental relationship between human beings and nature, describing the latter as a friend who helps without any particular agenda. In addition, the "forest" is a representation of all that exists in its natural state, but the "modular and walled houses" are a metaphor of the incompetence of people to control the world without the presence of nature. Ella's perspective on the people has been altered as a result of this kind of mindset; in fact, she has to push herself to refrain from "hating them" in order to see them. These people have

replaced the forest with new dwellings. From that point on, Ella made the decision to teach people about climate change so that they might "stop polluting and destroying" the magical land.

The results of climate change include things like "*fires, floods, and droughts*" (p. 2), among other possible outcomes. The environmental degradation that has been proven by the signs of "*exploited, destroyed, and polluted*" (p. 2) is represented by these impacts for the purpose of demonstrating the destruction. "one word that seemed to connect it all, climate change" (p. 2) is how Thompson's tale summarizes the myriad of effects that climate change has on the world.

Despite the fact that she had been urging people to safeguard the environment for a considerable amount of time, nobody paid attention to her because of the colors of the world until recently. He suffered emotional harm as a result of people's lack of belief. Her realization that she might be the only person who cares about preserving the environment came after a considerable amount of time had passed. In spite of the fact that people use the environment for their own financial purposes, the environment, which is responsible for providing comfort to all living beings, is not bothered. It became more important to listen to the sound of vehicles than it was to listen to the sound of birds. As a result, rather than cutting down trees, they began constructing enormous structures and houses instead of utilizing wood for furniture and planting new trees on land. Fans were invented to provide cool air in place of the shade that trees provide. She is unable to do anything but scream despite the fact that seeing all of this crushes her heart. The fact that the abstract threat is rooted in Ella's personal experience, such as the loss of "her animal friends" and "her trees," amplifies the emotional impact that it has on her. Ella goes from being a member of the audience to being a teacher. The consistent response that she made to the degradation of the environment sheds light on the primary point that the story is trying to convey, which is the importance of taking early action. Through her participation in writing as a form of dissent, she has made the shift from passive observation to active advocacy over the issue. Ella conducts research on sustainability and reveals the complexity of environmental concerns. These challenges demonstrate the diverse and interwoven nature of issues such as pollution, harm, and socioeconomic implications. As a result of her despondency regarding the widespread pollution and exploitation, the psychological repercussions of watching environmental destruction without fast answers are brought into sharper focus. As a significant emotional response to the sense of urgency and dissatisfaction, the impulse to "*scream to the world* (p. 3)" is a powerful emotional response.

The fact that Ella experienced emotions of isolation in the aftermath of her loss, as she felt "like the only one who mourned its loss," is illustrative of a more major difficulty in environmental advocacy, which is the transfer of individual comprehension into community action. A major issue in eco-semiotic theory is brought to light by the difference between individual consciousness and the reaction of society. This dilemma highlights the importance of both individual and social mobilization in the process of addressing environmental concerns. Because it indicates a compelling need for decisive action, Ella's commitment to "*demand that they cease*" highlights the crucial relevance of effective reactions to environmental cues. This is because it suggests that there is a pressing need for action.

Conclusion

Thompson adeptly employs a variety of linguistic signs to raise awareness regarding environmental destruction. The narrator primarily discusses two subjects. The first is that in the past, nature was in its true hues, and people not only benefited from it but also loved and protected it, as evidenced by the main character Ella, his mother, and grandmother. Secondly, the current generation has become so progressive that they are destroying nature, including trees, wildlife, and water, in order to satisfy their materialistic desires. As a result, the environment is deteriorating. Additionally, the author has exhibited exceptional proficiency in employing linguistic signs to characterize nature as "forests, trees, birds, water," and climate change as "industrialization" and "houses."

Hence, this study appreciates the way in which Thompson has guided us about environmental issues. It also suggests to explore further ecological issues in order to educate people. Moreover, by using an interdisciplinary approach, the study also provides a framework that can be used to analyze other texts that articulates environmental issues.

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