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Deep Ecological Consciousness and Interconnectedness between Humans and Nature in Thoreau's *Poems*

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Abstract

Deep ecological criticism emphasizes the biocentric approach to analyze the literary texts, whereas the anthropocentric approach is human-centric. Therefore, the major purpose of this study is to bring balance to the ecosystem between humans and nature by analyzing Thoreau's poetry from a biocentric point of view. It relooks radically the relationship between humans and nature on deeper level because the extreme human-centric development has been inviting many ecological crises. Therefore, this paper critically discusses, analyzes, and interprets Henry David Thoreau's selected poems from a deep ecological perspective to explore the deep ecological consciousness and interconnectedness between humans and nature. Deep ecology is a new perception against anthropocentric ideas, which proposes a new solution and visualizes the inexorable current ecological challenges. Thoreau is a transcendentalist poet, his poetry expresses the profound interconnectedness between humans and nature which is unexplored, yet richly found in his poems. His poems express the wisdom of humans' inner experience with nature and longing for harmony with nature. Consequently, the present paper will contribute to strengthening the relationship among all biospheres, thereby raising human ecological consciousness and increasing climate resilience.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, environment, transcendentalism, biocentric

Introduction

The ecocriticism focuses on the relationship between humans and nature in literary texts. Through the study of nature, culture, and human interrelations, it examines and investigates the global ecological crisis. There are different

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perspectives of ecocriticism, this research paper deploys the deep ecological perspective, heightening that all organisms in nature are equal, and serve an important role to bring ecological balance among all biosphere. Furthermore, it asks deep ontological questions about the harmonious relationship of human and nonhuman world. Henry David Thoreau's poetry has been discussed from the shallow ecological perspective. Similarly, many critics have mischaracterized nature poets as escapists. Therefore, this research paper unfolds the deep ecological interconnectedness between humans and nature.

The purpose of relooking Thoreau's selected poems: "I am the Autumnal Sun," "Song of Nature," "The Inward Morning," "Tall Ambrosia" is to discover a deep ecological consciousness and interconnectedness by analyzing and interpreting his writing from a deep ecological perspective. Fundamentally, ecology focuses on the human being as the center, which is called the anthropocentric perspective. This view emphasizes that everything in nature is meant to serve human beings, which has been increasing many ecological imbalances. Therefore, deep ecology advocates all the organisms of nature are inherent, interconnected, and equally important. Thoreau is an important figure of the American literary and philosophical movement known as New England transcendentalism. His essays, books, and poems have advocated two major themes over the course of his intellectual career: nature and life. Though he highly emphasizes nature in his poems, his writing is less discussed from a deep ecological perspective.

While reading the selected poems by Thoreau some research questions arise: Does the poet only bemuses himself with nature by its corporeal beauty, or does he also find inner connectivity and try to advance humans' ecological consciousness? In these selected poems, nature's mysterious power is expressed in different ways. These poems search for freedom as nature, their connectivity with nature is not only satisfied or sublimed by nature rather they are alerting humans to ecological consciousness and interconnectedness in a deeper way.

Literature Review

Henry David Thoreau's poetry has attracted and analyzed a voluminous amount of criticism, and studies in English. Such criticism analysis and study have touched many different perspectives. Many critics have also discussed his poems from romantic perspectives. Among them describing the romantic notion of Thoreau's poetry, as Smith (1985) makes the point in her paper, "Walking" from England to America: Re-Viewing Thoreau's Romanticism:

In analyzing Thoreau's place in the romantic tradition, it is helpful to consider Robert Langbaum's conception of romanticism as a series of

individual efforts to renew an emotional, spiritual connection to nature after the dualistic split of the eighteenth century. . . Implicit in a reworking of the past, for Thoreau, is his need to proclaim his identity both as an American and as a modernist. In establishing his own identity and constructing his own form of romanticism. (p. 222)

This analysis shows that Thoreau's poetic characteristics are deeply related to the notion of romanticism, which describes the glorification of nature, emphasis on aesthetic beauty, themes of solitude, imagination, and vivid sensory description. Therefore, it underscores that his poetry establishes the foundation of romanticism, but it also uncovers the inner relationship of the poet with nature. It is not just a mere description, rather his poetry needed to be observed from a deep ecological perspective. As critic Stickers (1976) writes about Thoreau's poetry in his paper, "Living the Poetic Life: Henry David Thoreau's Experiment at Walden Pond":

Thoreau produces a spark, or shock, which awakens the higher, poetic consciousness. This, in turn, begins a self-perpetuating reciprocity by which the poetic in Nature inspires the poetic in the individual and enhances his ability to listen to Nature's song, thereby creating a continually deeper and deeper appreciation of Nature . . . While the written poem can be casually dismissed as idle dreaming, the life poem stands as an irrefutable testimony that such human ideals are not in vain. (p. 8)

Here, critic Stickers describes the higher poetic consciousness arisen through the interconnection with nature and human intuitions, which means nature's power inspires the poet to listen to the nature's song. This description shows romantic attributes, and also describes the bitter truth of humans' attitudes towards nature and the poetic consciousness described here need to explain from the point of ecological consciousness. There are underlined meanings which suggests that the self is a part of nature and that humans can develop their deep ecological consciousness by experiencing nature. Therefore, his poems are not only describing nature as a romantic object but exploring himself in nature and searching the inner harmony. As Naess basic principles of deep ecology believes that richness and diversity of life forms contribution to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves. These evidences stress that his poetry needed to be rediscovered from a deep ecological perspective to expand the deeper relationship between humans and nature.

Similarly, Wells (1944) describes Thoreau's poetry from the perspective of spiritualism in his research paper, *An Evaluation of Thoreau's Poetry*:

Moreover, he is a spiritual cosmopolitan by virtue of his intuitive grasp of the poetic imagination of other periods than his own and not by any mere wealth of allusions which he plunders from abroad. . . He makes no display of his internationalism, for it is the most natural and instinctive thing about him. (p.101)

Critic suggests that his poems consist of metaphysical elements and universalism. No doubt, his poetic imagination searches for the hidden incorporeal strength in nature. At the same time, being a poet he himself tries to realize those spiritual aspects of nature, therefore, he does not only become overwhelmed by nature but rediscovers his own self. However, deep ecologists emphasize the humans' ecological ethics need to develop biocentric inner connectedness with nature together with personal spirituality. Deep ecologists Session (1995) also explains that the interconnectedness between human and nature is essential, in the book *Deep Ecology for the Twenty-first Century*:

Shallow ecology is anthropocentric. It views as above or outside of nature, as the source of all value, and ascribes only instrumental, or use value to nature. Deep ecology does not separate humans from the natural environment nor does it separate anything else from it. It does not see the world as a collection of isolated objects but rather as a network of phenomena that are fundamentally interconnected and interdependent. Deep ecology recognizes the intrinsic values of all living beings. (p. 20)

These lines make point the difference between shallow ecology and deep ecology. It clarifies that deep ecology emphasizes the deeper interconnectedness of human beings with nature. From the deep ecologist's point of view, humans are the part and parcel of nature; they believe that all the participants of nature are interrelated to each other, though they are distinct in nature. Therefore, Thoreau's poetry though seems spiritual and mystical; in fact, they are searching for a deeper relationship between humans and nature.

Moreover, describing the writing style of Thoreau, Bull (1973) writes in *Thoreau and the Literary Excursion* from the transcendentalist point of view:

Difference between Whitman and Thoreau and the popular excursion, in addition to the fact that their writing is simply more difficult, is that they refuse to do no more than daydream; they must also prophecy, whereas Margaret Fuller is largely content to remain on the level of description and anecdote. This made Whitman and Thoreau less popular but truer to Transcendentalist ideals of art. (p. 205)

This highlights Thoreau's writing from a transcendentalist lens, Bull compares his writing with other nature poets, though he is a daydreamer, he searches for the hidden connectivity with nature. This also emphasizes Thoreau's uniqueness in his writing which is more concerned with nature's incorporeal power and mysticism. Even though Thoreau describes nature and its transcendence power, in his poetry he also describes the interconnection of human life and nature, this research paper will explore another deep dimension of Thoreau's poetry.

Consequently, this research paper will focus on the study of deep ecological interconnectedness between humans and nature in selected poetry by Thoreau, applying recently developed deep ecological philosophy by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess, the American sociologist Bill Devall, and the American philosopher George Sessions, who focus on a radical change in humans' relationship to nature to maintain the equilibrium between human and nature.

Methods and Procedures

This research has applied a qualitative study through an analysis of deep ecologists Arne Naess, the American sociologist Bill Devall, and the American philosopher George Session's theoretical parameter of deep ecology to examine, analyze and interpret the selected poetry of Henry David Thoreau. Ecocriticism has different major trends: Arcadian discourse, Ecosystem discourse, Environmental justice discourse, Ecological justice, Ecofeminism, Eco Marxism, Toxic discourse, Discourse on animal rights, Environmental apocalypse, and Deep ecology. But, this research will discuss, analyze and interpret the selected poetry by Henry David Thoreau by applying deep ecology; a recently developed ecocritical perspective, which focuses on a radical change in humans' relationship to nature on a deeper level: a biocentric holistic perspective.

Arne Naess coined the term "deep ecology" and gave it a theoretical foundation. The deep ecological perspectives aim to value everything in the environment as its distinct uniqueness, and searches deep ecological interconnectedness of ecology asking deeper questions about the relationship between humans and nature, believing that all organisms of the biosphere have equal and reciprocal relationships and all are equally important for ecological balance. Applying this theoretical perspective, this research will unfold the deep ecological interconnectedness between humans and nature in the selected poems of Thoreau. In this research paper, Thoreau's four nature poems will only be discussed and analyzed.

Results and Discussion

Thoreau is a philosopher of nature and its relation to the human condition. In his early years, he followed Transcendentalism, which was an idealist philosophy advocated by Emerson, Fuller, and Alcott. They believe that an ideal spiritual state transcends, or goes beyond, the physical and empirical realm. Thoreau is mostly concerned with the incorporeal aspect of nature, in which he believes that there is an ideal and physical reality and both are interconnected. His poetry describes the natural beauty, nature's power, and the mystical strengths of the universe. Moreover, his poetry unfolds the interconnectedness of self and nature. As Thoreau (2012) compares himself with the sun in the poem, *I am the Autumnal Sun*:

I am the autumnal sun,
With autumn gales my race is run;
When will the hazel put forth its flowers,
Or the grape ripen under my bowers?
When will the harvest or the hunter's moon
Turn my midnight into mid-noon? (p. 24)

In these lines, he imagines himself as the autumn sun and asks humans to cooperate with him. In these imagined inner dialogue, he imagines and expresses the sun's suffering through the symbols of nature. Nature is inseparable from the poet himself. This deep connection proves that he is not enjoying nature's beauty but rather searching for other dimensions of his relationship with nature. In this poem, he further asks to turn his midnight to mid-noon in the beauty of nature as the sun he wants to be inseparably one with nature's beauty. As Hinchman (1989) writes about deep ecology in their paper "Deep Ecology" and the Revival of Natural Right:

Thus, to answer the question, "What does it mean to be human?" The Deep Ecologist tries to situate people in a more encompassing natural-cultural totality in light of which both the meaning of nature and of individual human existence will be illuminated. The telos of the individual, his or her full development as a human being, cannot be conceived except in the context of a flourishing nature. (p. 210)

It proves that without understanding nature, it is difficult to understand human existence. Humans need nature to become complete, humans and nature have indispensable interconnection. Humans and nature are inseparable. This enlivens the deep ecology that human self-centeredness is humans' ignorance of superiority. Humans are not superior being but also a part of nature. The deep interconnection

needed to be discovered to advance human consciousness toward other organisms. He imagines himself as the autumn sun harvesting all the creation and as well as delves into its depression. It is a fundamental requirement for humans to become the conscious owners of nature as the other parts of nature are responsible and move according to natural laws. What Naess (1995, p.15) argue is, in his paper *The Deep Ecology Movement Some Philosophical Aspects*, “we increasingly see ourselves in others, and others in ourselves. This self is extended and deepened as a natural process of the realization of its potentialities in others.” This also clarifies the interconnectedness of all human and nonhuman beings on earth. Similarly, Thoreau (2012) writes about the deeper connectedness of nature in his poem *Song of Nature: Mine are the night and morning*,

The pits of air, the gull of space,
The sportive sun, the gibbous moon,
The innumerable days.
I hide in the solar glory,
I am dumb in the pealing song,
I rest on the pitch of torrent,
In slumber, I am the strong. (p.49)

In this poem, the poet connects himself to morning and night, he tries to find himself in air and hollow space, and his motivation seems to be lost in the sacredness of nature. Poet’s imagination is expanding into the mysterious creation’s beauty of mysterious creation. He wants to hide inside nature and is overwhelmed by the sun and moon. This poem describes the inexpressible feeling of nature inside the human, and how much humans want to be intermixed with nature. A deep ecological perspective also uncovers the inner attachments of human being towards nature asking deeper questions about humans and nature’s relationship. In the same way, critic Luke (1997) also asserts the essence of deep ecology in his paper, “*Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered: Devall and Sessions on Defending the Earth*”:

Deep ecology has been developed by outdoors person—mountain climbers, backpackers, field biologists—with experience in observing natural phenomena and comes from the conservation/preservation movement” and “seeks to develop a new paradigm, questions the essence of human civilization, fundamentally condemns human overpopulation and industrialism, is anti-modern and future primitive. (p. 183)

Deep ecology also questions humans' egos and humans' civilization. How external industrialization devours the inner connection with nature. Poets are lamenting in front of nature and asking to be submerged into its gamut which opens the heart of poets toward nature's sublime. The higher consciousness of poets arises through the beauty of nature at the same time, why do poets compare self to nature? Why do they find more inner satisfaction with nature? These questions lead us toward the inner imbalance in a poet's mind by external development. Therefore, poets search for their inner original relationship with nature, in the selected poetry of Thoreau also has such lamentations, stillness, and queries for interconnectedness. Adhering to the importance of connectedness with nature, Lewis (1993) explains humans' attitudes and their connectedness in his article *On Human Connectedness with Nature*:

Distance from nature, which has undoubtedly intensified over the past few centuries, easily leads to an unconscionable denial of the finitude of most natural resources, as well as an inability to grasp the limited capacity of ecosystems to process the waste materials generated by human activities. Moreover, for many if not most human beings, natural landscapes offer infinite aesthetic and intellectual delights. A great many of us suffer deeply when we feel cut off from nature. (p. 799)

It illustrates that contemporary humans' attitudes towards nature and the consequences which increase the humans' inner emptiness. That is why, humans need to remain connected with nature for aesthetic and emotional strength, and being distant from nature, always make emptiness in humans. Therefore, interconnectedness with nature is important to human beings. As Thoreau (2012) expresses his inner interconnectedness in the poetry *The Inward Morning*:

Packed in my mind lie all the clothes
Which outward nature wears
And in its fashion's hourly change
It all things else repairs.
In vain I look for change abroad,
And can no difference find,
Till some new ray of peace uncalled
Illumes my inmost mind. (p. 55)

This poem elucidates the natural phenomena which are all interconnected, it explains nature and its intuition which are interconnected with everything. In this stanza, Thoreau explains and celebrates these mysterious attributes of nature and

what goes in his inner thoughts. His motivation is to find harmony between nature and himself. As he is aware of the coming morning the flowers and trees are also aware of the coming morning. In these lines, the poet relates humanity and nature's interconnectedness. He further describes until the "ray of peace...Illumes" his mind. This "ray" is human awareness that tells him that the "change" or the sunrise, is coming. Here, the poet searches for the connection point between his mind and nature's laws, which are invisible but demonstrated through the outer body. He compares him to nature and finds no difference in essence. Deep ecologists as well search for the deeper interconnection among all biospheres, their inherent value together with their inseparable relationship with others. For example, deep ecologist Devall (1985, p. 65) writes clearly in his book, *Deep Ecology*, "The foundations of deep ecology are the basic intuitions and experiences of ourselves and Nature which comprise ecological consciousness." This admonishes that humans' interconnection with nature is unavoidable to develop ecological consciousness. This poem also shows Thoreau's attachment to nature which he beautifully expresses by comparing his inner mind to nature's flows.

Similarly, Thoreau (2012) expresses his inner connectivity in his poem, I am the Autumnal Sun:

Sometimes a mortal feels in himself
Nature – not his Father but his
Mother stirs within him, and
He becomes immortal with her immortality. (p.24)

Here, in this first stanza of the poem, the poet juxtaposes his inner self with his changeable nature. Sometimes, he feels immortal as nature, sometimes lifeless. In the poem, he refers to himself as the autumnal sun and imagines depression about the coming winter and its lifelessness. He expresses his deep interconnectivity with nature describing himself through the autumn sun showing the similarity between his life and the autumn sun.

Thoreau's poems are analyzed from the transcendentalist perspective searching for the mysterious energy in nature. The underlined purpose is to rediscover the interrelationship with nature. Therefore, his poems are uncovering the hidden connectedness of humans to all biospheres. Thoreau's deep interest revives the ecological consciousness of humans for better equilibrium among all participants of nature. Deep ecologists also emphasize this new biocentric deeper perspective and believe that all organs of the biosphere are equal. This understanding they believe is

the best way to deal with all ecological crises. In the poem Tall Ambrosia he further expresses:

We trample underfoot the food of gods
And spill their nectar in each drop of dew—
My honest shoes, fast friends that never stray
Far from my couch, thus powdered, countrified,
Bearing many a mile the marks of their adventure. (p. 53)

In the poem “Tall Ambrosia” Thoreau explains the humans’ ignorance of the natural mystery, this poem describes “Ambrosia” as the mythical food of god for immortality. Metaphorically, he describes the human’s haphazardness towards nature’s beauty and power. In these lines of poem, the speaker explains that humans are walking through the fields of nectars of gods unnoticed. He sees humans’ negligence and ignorance that they pass through the immortal plant. “Trample underfoot the food of the gods.” In this line, he mentions not just himself but “We.” Here, “we” represents humanity that neglects the beauty and power of nature. He further adds that humans are unknowingly destroying nature when he describes the field as full of nectar but, humans are far from the fact that they are living in nature’s mystery and destroying nature for only selfish purposes. Therefore, it opens the discussion of deep ecological interconnectedness between humans and nature. In the book *Ecocritique Contesting the Politics of Nature, Economy and Culture* describing nature and human relationships, Luke (2002) explains deep ecology:

In liberating Nature, everything in the biosphere would be treated as an animate subject with inherent rights for self-realization. Thus, “the intuition of biocentric equality is that all things in the biosphere have an equal right to live and blossom and to reach their individual forms of unfolding and self-realization within the larger self-realization. (p. 9)

Here, critic describes the fundamental ideas of deep ecologists, summarizing their core ideas. He emphasizes that everything in nature is necessary to treat as a living being. All biospheres have an equal and unique role to bring balance to nature. In that process, all need to realize themselves to be united with the greater self which means nature. Therefore, it is humans’ responsibility to rediscover themselves by searching for their dynamic interconnectedness with all biospheres. Deep ecologists’ major concern is also to discover all biospheres’ inherent values and their interconnectedness.

Similarly, Thoreau (2012) expresses the feeling of interconnectedness with nature in his poem 'I am the Autumnal Sun':

The mast is dropping within my woods,
The winter is lurking within my moods,
And the rustling of the withered leaf
Is the constant music of my grief . . . (p. 25)

Here, the poet compares the suffering of humans to nature. His metaphoric poem 'I am the Autumnal Sun' represents nature. This poem describes the deep emotional sorrow of nature by personifying the sun as human, which emphasizes the inseparable relationship among all biosphere. As Naess (2003, p.15) argues in his paper *The Deep Ecology Movement Some Philosophical Aspects*, "we increasingly see ourselves in others, and others in ourselves. This self is extended and deepened as a natural process of the realization of its potentialities in others". This proves that humans are extended beings by many others, the deep interdependence and the natural process scrutinize our values and responsibility as humans; either the supreme of everything or the part of this nature. Naess deep ecological ideas strongly oppose the human-centered anthropocentric perspective, he describes humans as the part of nature. Humans exist through their relationship with others. He sees everything in the universe as unique and interrelated. William (1964) also encapsulates the theme of Thoreau's poetry in the paper *The Concept of Inspiration in Thoreau's Poetry*:

As do numerous other poets trying to develop a consciousness of meanings hidden behind the appearance of things, Thoreau frequently developed his poems by means of antitheses, by balancing the observed with the envisioned. In doing this he really is embodying in poetry transcendental dualisms, balances between Understanding and Reason, Fancy and Imagination, the source of Talent and the source of Genius. (p. 467)

William affirms that Thoreau's poems search for the hidden inner connectivity among all the biosphere. He further experiments on humans' imaginations and feeling about nature's beauty. He tries to blend inner feelings and outer reality of the human and nature relationship. Therefore, this research discussed and analyzed Thoreau's poems' hidden attributes of deep ecological consciousness and interconnectedness between humans and nature.

The above poems of Henry David Thoreau search for the interconnection. Thoreau's poetry is deeply connected with nature and its invisible attributes, which are not only describing the beauty and power of nature but search for the deep interconnectedness in human and nonhuman life for the dynamic relationship of nature.

Conclusion

This paper critically analyzed, interpreted, and discussed the selected poems of transcendentalist poet Henry David Thoreau from a deep ecological perspective to find the interconnectedness between humans and nature and deep ecological consciousness. This paper found that these poems have deep-underlined suggestions, lamentations, and repentance of humans in relation to nature. It vivified the deep concern of the poet in his poetry which unfolded the deep ecological consciousness. This discussion suggested that humans need to find a deep interconnectedness with the nonhuman world to develop a dynamic relationship with nature. The poems discussed in this research have personified humans as nature organisms. Poet imagined himself as the sun birds and animals in his poetry, which expressed the humans as part of nature rather than the dominant subject as deep ecological principle believes that all living creatures have inherent value, because nature is not only a visible sublimed object but is a part of humans' life. This new perception of deep ecology has applied to look deeper meaning of poetry, which can help to interpret and analyze the literary texts to deal with the extreme consumerism tendencies and the technological development by human and the cause of ecological crises. Human selfishness is the cause of many ecological disasters; therefore, literature is necessary to look from deep ecocritical lenses to find the deep ecological connectedness among all biospheres. This ecocritical analysis of poetry will be helpful to advance our relationship with nature.

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