

Biophilia Valuation as an Analytical Tool: The Psyche of Ruth in Susan Hill's *In the Springtime of the Year*

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Abstract

Eco-psychology is a subfield of psychology that focuses on ecology to understand and investigate the emotional bond that people have with the natural environment. Biophilia theory advanced by Edward O. Wilson in his book *Biophilia* (1984), stresses on the notion that an individual is drawn to and is dependent upon nature. He also adds that humans have an inherent predisposition to focus on and identify with nature and other living things. The biophilia hypothesis contends that one's attraction to nature is genetically predisposed in humans. It also asserts that some people have an innate love for nature. The present novel under study *In the Springtime of the Year* written by Susan Hill, a contemporary British novelist, revolves around the story of the transformation of Ruth through her experience with nature after the demise of her husband Ben. The study examines the biophilic facets of the character Ruth through nine essential characteristics of human species. The study intends to appreciate and identify with natural environment and to deal with environmental conservation, environmental ethics, restoration and resilience, thereby exploring the theory of Biophilia hypothesis through the nature bound character Ruth in the selected novel.

Keywords: Biophilia; Conservation of nature; Eco-criticism; Eco psychology; Restoration.

Introduction

Eco-psychology, which focuses on studying how people interact with nature and the environment, is essentially the intersection, integration, and unification of psychology and ecology. It is a branch of psychology

that focuses on ecology to comprehend and investigate issues that people have with the natural world. According to academic psychology which concerns mind, brain and behaviour, eco-psychology can be incorporated into literature in several ways, including (1) eco-psychology of the author (this research looks at how authors create works of literature that are connected to eco-psychology, such as those who advocate for environment in their writing); (2) eco-psychology of literature readers (this study observes the eco-psychology elements from the reader's response, such as the response to fiction that is related to humans and the environment) and (3) eco-psychology of literature (this study examines elements of eco-psychology in pieces of literature, such as the relationship between humans and the environment).

Humans are always bound to an interactional relationship with other species. Erich Fromm, told about the innate tendency of human beings to affiliate with the natural environment. Biophilia can be incorporated into literary studies since it also seeks the relationship between humans and environment. It is the desire for love towards all living beings on earth. The remarkable book *Biophilia* by Edward O. Wilson, defines biophilia as the "innate tendency to focus on life and lifelike processes" (1).

American biologist E. O Wilson and American social Ecologist Stephen R. Kellert co-edited the book *The Biophilia Hypothesis* in 1993. According to Biophilia theory, people are attracted to nature and all other living things because they naturally have a gravitational pull toward them. All human species have an innate love of the natural world and animals. The close relationship people have with nature, and the variety of life forms provided, as opposed to their interaction with their own constructed items, makes this abundantly clear about their sense of self-identity. The emotional, cognitive, artistic, spiritual growths of humans, as well as the commercial exploitation of the environment, are all tied to their need for nature. A profound, intimate need to relate to the variety of life around an individual can be reflected in one's propensity to avoid, reject, and perhaps destroy elements of the natural environment.

Susan Hill is a contemporary novelist who wrote the novel *In the Springtime of the Year*. In this, Ruth lost her husband just one year after devoted wedding. Ruth was widowed suddenly when her beloved husband, Ben, died in a horrific accident in the forest Helm Bottom. Ruth grows to be alone, hiding in her country home because she cannot express her sorrow and grief to Ben's family, who also was unable to cope with this loss. Only Jo, Ben's younger brother, can extend beyond his grief and give Ruth the

compassion she needs to pull herself out of her terrible misery.

This study examines the biophilic facets of the character Ruth through nine essential characteristics of species supposedly biological in basis for appreciating and identifying with the natural environment to explore the idea of biophilia. These hypothesized manifestations of the biophilia tendency are the utilitarian, naturalistic, ecologicistic-scientific, aesthetic, symbolic, humanistic, moralistic, dominionistic, and negativistic valuations of nature. This study also focuses on environmental conservation, ethics, restoration and resilience through the nature-bound character Ruth in the novel.

The first hypothesized dimension discussed here is about utilitarian dependence on nature. It is for the physical benefits derived from nature as a fundamental basis for human sustenance, protection, and security. In the novel, Ben, the husband of Ruth, plants apple trees for fruits. "cut them down, Ben had said, and we'll have firewood enough for years- for applewood was good, it burned sweetly and a soft, clean ash" (Hill, 14); which shows the utilitarian attitude of Ben. He is an example for all human beings who show only materialistic attitude towards nature. The anthropocentric cultured men do not consider nature. They constantly view nature as a resource to be used and destroy it for their purposes. They cut trees only when it serves their goal. Nurturing plants is done with a sense, just as sowing seeds is done for future purpose. Their behaviour towards nature demonstrates that humans can only think of nature in terms of how they can use it to their advantage.

The second value is naturalistic, and it is the satisfaction experienced through close touch with nature that might be viewed simply as the naturalistic inclination. According to Stephen R. Kellert and Edward O. Wilson, says: "The mental and physical appreciation associated with this heightened awareness and contact with nature may be among the most ancient motive forces in the human relationship to the natural world, although its recreational importance appears to have increased significantly in modern industrial society". (*The Biophilia Hypothesis* 50) Ruth expresses her experience with nature as "that she no longer felt strange, the only person in an empty, dead world" (14). Through her direct experience with nature, Ruth feels satisfied. The way one spends time with nature will reflect on the physical, psychological and emotional health of an individual. Nature always soothes the person who depends on it.

Another similar incident in the novel is when Ruth and Godmother Fry go

to Cantlow Hill for picnic. The air was dry and fragrant, but she still loved everything she saw because it was all there when Ben was in the physical world. The conflict that she got from the earth is seen when "They ate their picnic, eggs and apples and cheese and bread, sitting on the cool grass among the gravestones, and Ruth had closed her eyes and prayed for this to never end" (136); which is unmatched to anything in the world than her husband, Ben. Her close relationship experiences with nature make her to forget her sorrow. While Ben's death broke her heart earlier, her mind probes for consolation from nature.

The third dimension is ecologicistic-scientific value. It says that "The sense of nature's functional and structural inter-connectedness may have further instilled in the prudent observer a cautious respect for nature likely to temper tendencies toward over-exploitation and abuse of natural processes and species" (53). In the same novel, Ruth loves and respects hens: "The pleasure she took in caring for the hens was the only thing that had never felt her, she had clung to that. This nightly journey down the garden had been one thing, to which she looked forward each day" (14-15). She protects the hen and is cautious about the bird. The mutual understanding between any species and human should be preserved to avoid over-exploitation of the species. But Ruth's husband, Ben, is contrary to her. The materialistic nature of Ben exploiting resources for his selfish needs is seen when "Ben had laughed at her care for the hens. He had no dislike of them, they were useful, he said, and no trouble, they gave good eggs" (15).

The fourth one is aesthetic value. It is described as

The human instinctive recognition of or striving for the ideal found in nature's harmony, symmetry, and order as a model of human experience and conduct can be seen in the aesthetic response. The adaptogenic significance of the aesthetic experience of nature may also be linked to related sensations of calmness, peace of mind, psychological well-being, and self-assurance. (55)

In the novel *In the Springtime of the Year*, Ruth understands the change in nature since she has the instinct to recognize nature's harmony and symmetry. Ruth says in the novel, "But there was something in the air, something, a new smell, the beginning of the growth and as she walked, she had felt a great happiness spurt up within her, and the countryside had looked beautiful, every detail, every leaf-vein and grass blade was clear and sharp, it was as though she had been reborn into new world." (30) Here, she apprehends minute changes in nature and she tries to relish

the beauty of nature. Through 'Forest Bathing', which is an ancient Japanese processes of relaxation from nature, Ruth is rejuvenated in her mind and soul.

Additionally, another incident that shows the value of aesthetic quality is, when she collects some wildflowers to decorate her house as walks through the woodland. On that day; "she walked and walked, under the speedwell-blue sky, and everything was excellent, rare, she had never been so happy, . . . she crossed the river and went along the river bank, she lay on the short, dry grass of the ridge . . . full of hope" (131-132). This shows that one can also get hope after sneaking into the woods. Thus, the quest for harmony and serenity of mind is driven by aesthetic value.

The fifth is symbolic value, which says that, only the natural world's remarkable diversity, complexity, and vividness as an exceedingly rich and textured system seem to match the dependency of the human psyche on exceptionally varied subtle distinctions. The evolution of human language and the complexity and exchange of ideas encouraged by this symbolic approach are possibly the most important examples of using nature as a symbol. In the novel *In the Springtime of the Year*, the kitchen is a symbol for Ruth to depend on getting relief from stress. Whenever she is in anxiety, she goes to the kitchen and cooks something; through this she comforts her mind. "She got up and went into the kitchen and made a tea for them, she felt quiet calm" (39); In another instance, where her family is stressing up to keep manners in the funeral house, "Ruth got up and went into the kitchen, and saw that the moon had risen, and the light of it was shining on to the rose quartz . . . while she was there she did not feel so detached from everything"(43). Here, the kitchen symbolizes nature that Ruth wants to couch in. She feels secure inside the kitchen which reveals that Ruth seeks support from nature to calm her mind.

The sixth is humanistic value which reflects that appreciation of nature reflects feelings of intense emotional ties to specific components of the natural world. Even though this sensation is typically reserved for domesticated animals, the humanistic experience of intense fondness for particular aspects of nature can be articulated as a feeling of 'love' for wildlife. When Ruth went to the woods after the death of Ben, she crouched down and put her hands on the bark of the tree and thought, "it had been the utterly right place for Ben to die here, in wood. Because it was his place, he had known it since childhood, he was a forester" (67). There is an intense relationship between Ruth, Ben and the woods when she touches the bark and feels the intense relationship with the tree, like with her husband,

Ben. Ironically, he dies accidentally while cutting trees in Helm Bottom.

According to *The Biophilia Hypothesis*, the seventh value is moralistic, which includes deep affinities, a sense of moral obligation, and even veneration for the natural world. "This perspective often reflects the conviction of a fundamental spiritual meaning, order, and harmony in nature" (59). This moralistic feature is also evident in the character of Ruth. When Jo came with a rabbit to cook, Ruth skinned up and made a dish. But after that "Ruth had wept, then, out of shame and guilt at the food waste, and pity of the rabbit which had been living, and then shot dead, and all to no purpose" (19). It is Ruth's naturalistic attitude to make her weep because of pity for the animal since Jo shoots without regret. The fact that she is concerned about cutting trees and destroying them is seen when she felt unhappy about the apple trees which is going to be cut down and she said, "The apple trees - I don't know what to do with those either - there isn't any fruit. Hardly any. They're old - Ben was going to fell them" (187); She knows that in some way or the other, nature will give back all the wrong doings of humans on earth.

The eighth value according to *The Biophilia Hypothesis* by Kellert and O. Wilson is dominionistic, which means that:

Nature reflects the desire to master the natural world. Its occurrence today is often associated with destructive tendencies, extravagant waste, and despoliation of the natural world. Yet this view may be too narrow and associated with exaggerated dominionistic trends. Life, even in the modern era, may be regarded as a tenuous enterprise, with the struggle to survive necessitating some measure of the proficiency to subdue, the capacity to dominate, and the skills and physical prowess honed by an occasionally adversarial relationship to nature (61).

In the same novel, Rydal is an anthropocentric character who makes people to work as woodcutters under him. He pays handsome amount to those who cut trees. He sells these logs and earns huge profit from them. Potter informs Ruth about the recent order of Rydal that there will be no end to Rydal's avarice. His dominant attitude is abundantly obvious in his statement which says, "Rydal was wanting a couple of trees down, big ones, he'd an order for a tonne of logs" (192). Rydal, is greedy and thinks only of his material needs. People around Rydal have a common opinion, that is;

Rydal destroys the trees and controlled the whole village. He never shows concern for the harm that his workers have caused to the earth. He never sows plants after his brutal acts of violence to nature. He uses the forest area to make profit. After gaining profit, he builds a huge house and does farming to increase his profits, this shows his disregard towards environment.

The ninth Biophilic value mentioned in *The Biophilia Hypothesis* is negativistic, which means that fear, aversion, and hostility toward many elements of the natural world is characteristic of the hostile experience of nature. Most conservationists believe that fear of and alienation from the natural environment is wrong and frequently causes suffering and devastation, which is not necessary. In the novel *In the Springtime of the Year*, when she sees husband's shirt, her hand trembled and "she wanted to run away, get out of herself, out of this fear and she could not move; she wanted to hide, in a cupboard or behind the chair...the sight of the garden filled her with horror now" (35). Before hearing the news of the death of her husband, she felt a wave of terror inside the mind, and she was alienated with nature. It is a kind of telepathy that nature wants to convey to Ruth. It is the most essential force within nature as nature retreats through killing of her husband who selfishly cuts the tree.

The nine values mentioned above support the Biophilia hypothesis that represents an essential human interaction with and reliance upon the natural world, indicating some degree of adaptive significance in the struggle to survive and, perhaps more significantly, to thrive and achieve personal fulfillment.

E. O Wilson sees the fundamental issue of biophilia as the visual pleasure and emotional allure connected to nature. A secondary relationship that has only recently been made with aesthetics is that of beauty. This association poses a risk because it could lead people to believe that beauty results from an interaction between an object's characteristics and the nervous system rather than being an intrinsic property of things that one considers to be 'beautiful' comparable to features like size, shape, texture, or weight.

By being creative in one's work, realising one's thoughts and actions, being highly competent and passionate about new improvements, thinking holistically, and having a strong feeling of unity, one can demonstrate biophilia in daily life. Ruth is also the kind of character who depends on the forest Helm Bottom for her worries. She thinks, ". . .there was another place, Helm Bottom, and that was different, it soothed her, all the

thoughts and feelings which churned about inside her when she sat by the grave were stilled, she could take hold of herself again, here in the woods, and breathe quietly, memories came back, and they were happy" (125-126). Helm Bottom soothes her from all the misfortunes in her life. Ruth is a biophilic character and relies on nature to escape from her tragic memory of tragic situations.

Another aspect in Biophilia is Biophobia. The 'biophobic side of the biophilia hypothesis' (*The Biophilia Hypothesis* 12) is where anxiety reactions to natural stimuli are located. They show how to look for signs of man's evolutionary past in contemporary human's emotional and behavioural responses to their surroundings. It may be shown that humans have the genetic capacity to respond in a certain way to various natural stimuli, such as animals, fragrance, noise, plants, and even geomorphic features, using these commonly accepted examples. These innate responses are linked to evolutionary responses of humans through series of events. They cannot be fully explained by ontogenetic development, personal experience, or social conditioning alone. Her innate fear of being alone and her anxiety are expressed through "The sight of the garden filled her with horror now, though it was the same. . . if it was an illness, then how could she explain it, what pain or injury could she single out? There had been no pain, no, everything she felt had been shock and fear" (35-36). Thus, one can infer that the human mind is not stable during every occasion; even though she is biophilic in nature.

The biophilic facets are so far connected to the restoration and adaptive behaviour of species also. A capability for restorative responses may be adaptive by aiding recovery from physical or mental conditions, such as illness or exhaustion, frequently accompanied by a drop in cognitive functioning or performance. After the death of her husband Ben, Ruth suffered in many ways. The only solace that she got was through Jo. Now she wants to adapt to life and circumstances. She said, "Shall we go to the sea? If - I'll do what you want" (112). "He searched her face and saw her excitement, her hope for pleasure, said, Yes. We'll go" (112). Here, thereby she tries to restore her life and adapt to the predicament that had taken place in.

Another aspect discussed in the theory of biophilia is protection of nature through environmental ethics. As a human, one has a responsibility to protect the environment. According to Kellert, Environmental philosophy is a subfield of the study of environmental ethics. Environmental ethics has advantages in that they (1) prevent environmental alienation and (2)

inspire people to care about the environment. Human ethical interactions with the environment are challenging since they span various disciplines and concerns with the people who have interest. Environmental ethics is also connected to the practical philosophy that preserves the natural entities and the beauty of the surroundings. If the environment is damaged, it loses its aesthetic appeal. As a result, to sustain an attractive environment, humanity must maintain, protect, and keep the environment safe. In the novel, Jo used to do hunts; he says, "When I was seven, I killed a rabbit. And that was the only wicked thing I have ever done in my life. And it was my fault" (111-112). Even though Jo regretted over killing rabbit, he enjoyed doing so. Ruth pitied the rabbit. Each and every animal is worth to nature's wealth and beauty. Human ethical interactions are defiance to protect nature. According to the idea of Stephen R. Kellert and E.O Wilson, different advantages have been granted in the human evolutionary battle to adapt, persevere, and prosper both as an individual and as a species by the largest valuational attachments with life and lifelike processes (ecological functions and structures).

The term 'resilience' refers to the capacity to foresee, plan for, and adapt to changing conditions as well as tolerate, deal with, and quickly recover from disturbances. Knowing one's thoughts, spirituality, origins, and future involves understanding one's personality. The secret is discovering how to use the natural resilience that every human being is born with. It entails learning one's inner essence and a sense of purpose. As a component of several ecosystems, humans impact all facets of ecosystem function, including ecological restoration. Ecosystem restoration is threatened by human actions that decrease biodiversity, deplete natural resources, pollute, alter land use, and fuel anthropogenic climate change. With one's biological system, an individual can restore his wounds through bonding with nature.

According to Theodore Roszak et al. in *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*, the earth will heal the soul's wounds through:

Wilderness journeys, nature walks, and adventure sports, when sensitively undertaken, can catalyse an intense bonding with the earth as a nurturing parent. Although this bonding serves as a powerful source of healing and transformation, participants are often left with a deep sense of powerlessness and depression upon returning to 'normal' life. (227)

Ruth wanted to go out to get some relief from the stress that she suffers,

she is tired of all thing, now she wants to forget all for just one for that she asks Jo that "let's go somewhere. . . . 'we'll go to the sea.' . . . We can walk to Theftton. And we have a whole day- Hadwell Bay" (110). Through these words itself, one can infer Ruth's bond with nature as a caring mother. Nature soothes the souls of the earth and helps an individual to transform. This transformation made her think about new life and "they lay on the sand, and Ruth half closed her eyes so that the sea and the sky danced together, . . . Coming up the lane, her body seemed to be floating, and her head was full of the sound of the waves, she felt washed clean by the salt air and sunlight. . . fresh air passed through every vein" (114-115). She got satisfaction after her visit to the sea.

It is understood that eco-psychology examines the human interconnectedness toward nature. It studies how humans are attached to nature and other living beings. Biophilia is the innate tendency to seek nature's wonder and depends on nature for human psychological well-being. The biophilia theory postulates that people are naturally inclined to seek relationships with nature and other living things. This article has relied on the conceptual and descriptive study to define the fundamental components of the biophilia hypothesis. Each value type has been argued for in this article as evidence of species's reliance on the natural environment and as a potential evolutionary benefit. There is hence a chance that their combined, interacting, and synergistic effects may result in a prospect of a more satisfying personal existence. The successful manifestation of biophilia may serve as a foundational element for a fulfilling sense of self. From this point of view, preservation of nature is justified not just in terms of its economic and material advantages but, far more importantly, for the enhanced possibility of satisfying a variety of emotional, intellectual, and spiritual demands in the human animal.

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