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## FROM THE BLEAK DUSK OF ECO-UTOPIA TO THE REVITALIZED DAWN OF ECO-TECHNOLOGY: NATURE REBOOTED IN *WALL.E*

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### Abstract

This article employs the theory of eco-criticism to analyze the evolution of nature from its degradation to the rejuvenation in the post-apocalyptic movie *Wall.E* (2008) which critiques consumerism, capitalism, industrialization and their detrimental effects on the environment. Focusing on the transition from eco-dystopia to technonature, this movie not only portrays a dystopian future of the 29<sup>th</sup> century where Earth has become uninhabitable due to the excessive waste and abandoned by humanity, but also explores the interdependent relationship between culture and nature for the sustainability of human race. The main protagonists, Wall.E and EVE in this movie lead to a transformative journey as they find a seedling which symbolizes the feasibility of reinstating the lost paradise. This marks a shift from eco-dystopia to technonature, where technology becomes a catalyst for ecological revival. This paper also examines into the concepts of anthropocene and ecocide by comparing the movies *Wall.E* and *Avatar* (2009). Furthermore, it strikes a parallel between the characters and themes in Milton's "Paradise Lost" and *Wall.E* to provide a deeper understanding of the film's underlying themes and explores the vicious circle of the deadly sins which are hinted in *Wall.E*, leading to the destruction of Earth. By embracing a holistic approach that integrates ecological sustainability, social equity and technological innovation, mankind can steer towards a future that harmonizes the needs of both humanity and the natural world. Thus, this study disintegrates the traditional dichotomy between nature and science and implies a harmonious relationship between the two which is indispensable for the sustainable environmental practices in the contemporary era.

**Keywords:** Anthropocene, Consumerism, Ecocide, Eco-criticism, Eco-dystopia, Indigenous, Nature, Robots, Techno nature.

## Introduction

In the present-day discourse on environmental concerns, the precarious relationship between mankind and the planet looms large. The prevailing socio-economic system of capitalism, driven by profit maximization and consumption has fueled a relentless pursuit of growth and material accumulation. This has engendered a voracious exploitation of natural resources, resulting in widespread environmental degradation on a global scale. The animated sci-fi movie *Wall.E* (2008) directed by Andrew Stanton set in a dystopian future serves as a poignant representation of this issue. This movie delves into the themes such as ecocide, consumerism and the consequences of human actions on the environment. Through its intricate storyline and symbolism, *Wall.E* critiques the contemporary society's unsustainable practices towards the environment and serves as a catalyst for urging human responsibility towards conserving the environment.

Mankind has repeatedly waged a war against nature; not treating it as a sustainer of life rather using it as a tool for mindless advancement of technology and civilization. Due to the looming dangers of ecological abuse, environmental issues have become an area of increased provocation for academicians and artists alike, finding itself in literature as well as films. (Chaudhary, 2019)

The movie centers on Wall-E (Waste Allocation Load Lifter: Earth Class), a waste collecting robot who finds a sapling which represents hope for Earth's rejuvenation. In the opening scene, the protagonist, Wall.E diligently carries out his daily routine of waste compacting and scavenging the remnants left by human beings who had abandoned the Earth. In this film, the arthropodal character Cockroach who accompanies Wall.E in the journey throughout the wasteland assumes a prominent role which not only symbolizes the tenacity and adaptability of species in the face of human-induced environmental degradation but also aligns with the overarching theme of the anthropocene which accentuates the consequences

of unscrupulous human actions on Earth's ecosystems. Amidst the vast dismal emptiness, Wall.E discovers a tiny plant, a symbol of hope which reignites his inquisitiveness and desire for affiliation with the planet. His life takes an unexpected turn when the sleek, technologically advanced robot EVE (Extraterrestrial Vegetation Evaluator) arrives on Earth by the Buy n Large (BnL) Corporate organization on a mission to find the signs of life. Initially he is captivated by EVE's elegance and as they develop a bond, he shares the treasures collected from the Earth including the plant with EVE. The discovery of the plant triggers a chain of reactions, leading Wall.E and EVE to the Axiom, a spaceship housing the remnants of humanity where they encounter a civilization following the sedentary lifestyle, controlled by the Buy n Large Company. It is a monopolistic corporation over all facets of human existence which facilitates Earth's evacuation. This highlights the perils of unchecked corporate dominance exemplified by the BnL's slogan 'Buy. Shop. Live'. As the Indian Researcher Chaudhary has rightly observed, "Their selection of toys, fashion, food and drinks substantiates the slogan by suggesting that to live the ideal life, one must continue buying and shopping" (2019).

The depiction of humans as obese and passive beings who rely entirely on technology shows the critical commentary on the repercussions of consumerist lifestyles. This fictional mega-corporation's relentless pursuit of profit and technological advancement leads to Earth's environmental degradation, forcing mankind to evacuate the planet which embodies the threats of corporate greed and the ecological impact of unchecked industrialization. Within this sterile environment the main protagonists meet other robots, including the quirky cleaning robot M-O who becomes their loyal companion on their journey. Through their resolute determination, Wall-E and EVE succeed in reawakening the latent and dormant human society in the Axiom. Simultaneously, McCrea, the Captain of the spacecraft Axiom liberates himself from the ship's automated governance and assists the protagonists to disrupt the prevailing order and initiates a transformative endeavor aimed at re-establishing a profound

connection with Earth and embracing a more ecologically viable way of life.

### **Eco-criticism: Rethinking the Human- Nature Connection in Literature**

Eco-criticism, a theoretical framework that emerged in the late 20th century examines the relationship between literature, culture and the natural environment. It analyzes how texts and artworks convey ecological themes, critique human exploitation of nature and promote environmental awareness. "The word 'eco' in the term Ecocriticism has its roots in Greek 'oikos' which means 'household'. Humans have abandoned their ancestral house and what they identify as 'home' due to their own consumeristic practices" (Chaudhary, 2019). By applying eco-criticism theory in the movie *Wall-E*, it unravels the profound ecological message and critiques consumerism, ecocide and the potential for redemption. The film revolves around the central theme of capitalism and portrays the Axiom spaceship as a representation of a hyper-consumerist society where convenience and instant gratification have led to the estrangement of individuals from nature and their own humanity. Conversely, *Wall-E*'s fascination with simple objects and his nurturing of a small plant symbolize the connotation of reuniting with nature and its intrinsic values. The film depicts the characters' relationship with nature which emphasizes the emotional connection that arises when humankind and robots engage with the natural world. This study aims to delve into the significance of the film by applying eco criticism theory to illuminate the ecological conservation it conveys and also explores the idea of technonature in which technology and nature coexist and cooperate for environmental rejuvenation.

### ***Wall-E*: A Dystopian Critique on Consumerism and Ecocide**

The narrative develops in a world where the multinational corporation Buy n Large has commodified every aspects of life by reducing human existence to mere consumerism. This depiction reflects on the current trajectory of the consumerist culture and raises pertinent inquiries

regarding sustainability and the repercussions of unchecked materialism.

The sheer amount of trash has turned the once hospitable planet completely into a completely uninhabitable one, forcing humans to flee into space. The soil has become infertile and the climate has turned hostile for any form of life to flourish....The film shows the struggle of humans creating a utopia after seven hundred years of abandoning their home planet due to uninhabitable conditions caused by extreme pollution. (Chaudhary, 2019)

The overwhelming power wielded by the Buy N Large Corporation not only let to the planet littered but also to apathetic, technologically reliant humankind in the Axiom. Captain McCrea becomes aware of the pernicious lifestyle of the BnL in the parallel dimension symbolizing the menace of uncontrolled capitalism. The alternate space is unduly reliant on convenience and technology, demonstrating commercialization and corporatocracy. Through stark juxtaposition between the artificial and the sterile environment of the spaceship and the desolate, trash-laden-Earth, this film underscores the mankind's loss of connection with the natural world. The spaceship's inhabitants have severed their ties with the natural world showing the consequences of societies driven by technology and consumerism. The dystopian storyline implies that people have the ability to change things despite social and environmental obstacles which accentuates the poignant themes of communal fragility and environmental degradation, appealing to reconsider one's relationship with the planet.

### **Eco-Dystopia in the Space: A Comparative Analysis of Axiom and Earth in *Wall-E***

With its gripping eco-dystopian story, *Wall.E* shows the planet as a wasteland, devoid of rich ecosystems and covered in mountains of trash. The depletion of natural resources, careless waste disposal and excessive human consumption are the main causes of the desolation which signifies the onset of the anthropocene epoch. Large stretches of trash and abandoned skyscrapers define the

landscapes which gives a strange and abandoned feel. This futuristic depiction not only indicates the upshot of a society that fails to address the proper disposal and management of waste materials but also shows the unsustainable practices that have caused the planet to deteriorate. Furthermore, *Wall.E* touches upon the concept of E-waste by showcasing how the robot, Wall.E sorts and collects outdated and discarded electronics, emphasizing the problem of electronic waste accumulation.

The Axiom which is very different from the Earth is opulent and technologically advanced, giving the impression of artificial perfection. The consumerist society inhabits a regulated, artificial environment and is cut off from the repercussions of their past actions on Earth. On Axiom, people are represented as passive users who interact with digitalized screens while cruising around on floating chairs. This human mechanization is a reflection of the detrimental effects of living a life disconnected from the natural world. The effects of excessive technological leaning is demonstrated in both Earth and Axiom in which the Earth experiences environmental destruction due to technological misuse whereas the alternate space depicts a society in which technology has supplanted interpersonal relationships and interaction which proves the contrasting environmental consciousness. The little plant serves as an emblem of hope on Earth symbolizing the resilience of nature and the potential for renewal which implies that an individual can bring a transformation.

#### **Indigenous Environmentalism: A Comparative Analysis of Environmental Protection in *Avatar* and *Wall.E***

Indigenous gardening practices have long been rooted in sustainable and holistic approaches which reflect a deep understanding of the interconnectedness between humankind, plants and the environment. Both the films, *Wall.E* and *Avatar* (2009) examine into the themes of environmental protection and the role of indigenous practices in safeguarding the planet. *Avatar*, directed by James Cameron is a science fiction which explores the concept of environmental protection. This movie depicts the fictional indigenous tribe

Na'vi on the planet Pandora who lives in harmony with their natural surroundings and strives to protect their environment from exploitation. The imaginary planet Pandora in this movie is portrayed as a lush and sacred home of the Navi which embodies their spiritual bond with nature and resisting human exploitation. They have a profound understanding of the interconnectedness of all living things and the need to maintain balance in their ecosystem. Na'vi's spiritual connection with Nature is symbolized by their sacred 'Tree of Souls' which represents the life force and collective consciousness of their planet. Their reverence for the environment is juxtaposed with the destructive intentions of the human corporation, Resources Development Administration (RDA) who seeks to exploit Pandora's resources. Similarly, in *Wall.E*, the eponymous robot stumbles upon a small sapling amidst a world engulfed in waste. The robot's fascination with the sapling illuminates the potential for rejuvenation and the importance of preserving nature's resilience. The Na'vi tribes and the robot Wall.E give a reminder that protecting the planet requires a shift in human behaviour which concedes the interdependence between homosapiens and nature. The irony lies in the fact that these non-human entities, Na'vi and Wall.E, exhibit the qualities that humans have failed to prioritize—respect for nature, sustainable practices and the recognition of the interconnectedness of all living beings. By blending the success of these avatars and robots against the shortcomings of humanity, these films critique the homosapiens' disregard for the environment offering an evocative reminder of the aftermath of human beings actions.

... as a foil for Earth's technology-dependent resource-intensive society, the Na'vi are represented as a stereotypical Indigenous population; they are cast as closer to nature in their role as the "ecological Indian." By using archaic portrayals of Indigenous peoples, the film uses an "Indigenous" voice to propel its environmental message. (Fritz, 2012)

Besides, *Avatar* and *Wall.E* convey the upshots of ignoring the wisdom of native cultures and the detrimental impact of exploiting resources.

In *Avatar*, the human corporation RDA's relentless pursuit of unobtainium, a valuable mineral leads to the destruction of Pandora's ecosystem and the displacement of Na'vi tribe. This narrative echoes real-world instances of indigenous people being displaced and their lands exploited for economic gain, resulting in ecocide. *Wall.E* interrogates the throwaway culture of modern society and the outcome of disregarding the environmental influence of human actions. The sapling discovered by Wall.E in the movie acts as an invitation to reconsider one's relationship with the planet. Thus, both *Wall.E* and *Avatar* propose valuable insights into the importance of environmental protection and the role of indigenous cultures in preserving the planet. In *Avatar*, indigenous knowledge is shown as a crucial element to understand the delicate balance between humankind and the environment. By learning from indigenous cultures, one can foster a harmonious coexistence with nature which ensures a sustainable future for succeeding generations. These films act as potent propaganda tool for environmental conservation by utilizing visual imagery, engaging narratives, techno-graphics and broad accessibility to raise awareness, foster empathy and sensitize individuals to play an active role in protecting the planet.

#### **"Paradise Lost" and Wall.E: From Eden to Earth**

By reimagining the motion film *Wall.E*, a parallel can be drawn between the characters in the film and those in Milton's "Paradise Lost" by portraying Adam as Wall.E and Eve as EVE. Similarly, the portrayal of Earth as a post-apocalyptic wasteland in the film mirrors the fall of Eden. Wall.E, the robot, embodies a caretaker role which symbolizes humanity's potential for eco-engineering whereas EVE represents hope, innovation and the possibility of redemption. The Garden of Eden is represented as a paradisiacal environment characterized by fecundity, verdant stretches, harmonious coexistence between humans and nature and a sense of ecological balance. In *Wall.E*, the Earth is depicted as a desolate wasteland ravaged by human negligence and overconsumption. The character Wall.E, embodies the custodial role akin to that of Adam, by symbolizing the need for environmental restoration.

Wall.E is left alone on Earth and Adam is initially alone in the Garden of Eden which shows their shared experience of solitude. Subsequently, the introduction of Eve and EVE respectively provides companionship. The female leads of both the works embody curiosity as they encounter the novel and the unknown which sparks a chain of transformative events whereas Wall.E and Adam in their own ways respond to this curiosity and engage with the newfound elements they encounter. "As the credits roll, we see EVE and WALL-E together on the new Earth: EVE has become the new Eve and the resurrected WALL-E the new Adam. If this film depicts the folly of unchecked capitalism as the source of evil in the world, then this new society represents atonement and the return of mankind to its place in the divine order" (Laycock,2009).

In "Paradise Lost", Eve succumbs to the temptation of the forbidden fruit which leads to the fall of humanity. The image of forbidden fruit is always associated with seduction similarly in *Wall.E*, 'technology' takes the place of the 'forbidden fruit' which represents mankind's dependence and addiction to technological amenities. Initially the relationship between Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden is often depicted as one of love and companionship which shows the promises of love but after being allured by the malevolent spells of Satan leads to the carnal cravings that marked 'the fall of man'. Similarly, the movie *Wall.E* emphasizes the power of love since Wall.E develops a deep emotional connection with EVE and this bond serves as a catalyst for redemption and ecological healing— 'the rise of man'. In Milton's "Paradise Lost", Eve is portrayed as a submissive and secondary figure to Adam but the film *Wall.E* presents a more egalitarian relationship between Wall.E and EVE which challenges the traditional gender roles. Both characters contribute equally to the narrative and collaborate in their efforts to restore the environment. This portrayal not only highlights the importance of gender equality but also the alliance in addressing ecological challenges by promoting sustainable practices. The 'Tree of Knowledge' in "Paradise Lost" represents forbidden knowledge, the result of disobedience whereas the 'plant' in *Wall.E* shows the transformative power of self-

awareness. Just as the 'The Tree of Knowledge' leads to the sequence of Original of sins, Nativity, Crucifixion and Resurrection, 'the plant' in *Wall-E* offers hope for redemption and the potential to restore a depleted environment. This interdisciplinary comparison shows the ethical dilemmas inherent in the pursuit of knowledge and the imperative to preserve the natural world.

In the analogy between "Paradise Lost" and *Wall.E*, it becomes evident that both serve as cautionary tales about the effects of destructing the harmony between homosapiens and nature and the dangers of unchecked corporate power respectively. While Satan, the evil incarnate is the motive for the obliteration of the perfect harmony between humankind and nature and also associated with original sin— the fall of man, BnL embodies the effects of a consumerist culture resulting in excessive production and capitalism. These portrayals reflect one's relationship with corporate entities and the environment which ultimately encourages a reevaluation of one's actions and the potential for a more sustainable future for the rise of man. Thus, by reimagining the Garden of Eden, the film *Wall.E* underscores the urgency of addressing environmental issues, promoting responsible consumption, waste management and the importance of balancing technological advancements with eco-centric notion to reinstate the lost paradise.

#### ***Wall.E* as a reflection of Humanity's Deadly Sins**

*Wall.E* proposes on the deadly sins through its depiction of a post-apocalyptic terrain and its anthropomorphic robot hero. The concept of the deadly sins is present in religious and philosophical traditions for centuries. These sins are considered to be vices which lead to moral decay. *Wall.E* not only examines the film's characters, settings and narrative which shed light on this timeless concept of the deadly sins - sloth, gluttony, greed, wrath, lust and pride but also offers a commentary on the penalties of these vices which transcends the limitations of traditional discourse.

The human race lies in bated breath hoping that greater implementation and effectiveness of Climate Change Adaptation

will be the main response from their returning leaders and envoys. Nonetheless, with all the warnings, the clarion calls, the signals, the data and the research over the years, it is still the seven deadly sins; pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, wrath and sloth; that plague progress against the damning future creeping up on us. (Kent, 2019)

The protagonist's monotonous and forlorn regimen of compressing trash in an abandoned world serves as a powerful metaphor for the sin of sloth. The consequences of human indolence and apathy that contributed to the planet's demise are emphasized by his untiring obligation to the mission. It becomes the sober reminder of how a civilization's disregard and failure to understand its responsibilities can lead to the destruction of the environment. The space ship becomes a representation of the results of unquenchable desires, mirroring a culture where convenience and pleasure are the primary goals. The sin gluttony highlights the effects of gluttonous behaviour of the people in Axiom who encounter physical and mental issues due to the loss of connection with the natural world and lack of organic consumption. With its unbridled corporate power and unmitigated avarice, the Buy n Large Corporation represents the evil of voracity and plays an integral role in the ecological breakdown of the planet. The sin of greed calls attention to the ramifications of uncontrolled materialism and the necessity of a more sustainable and responsible approach to resource management by reflecting on the effects of placing material gain ahead of environmental responsibility. The sins of pride and lust implied in the course of narrative criticize the lustful chase for technological gratification which draws attention to the possibility of putting meaningful relationships behind virtual experiences.

#### **Conclusion**

In the film *Wall.E*, the portrayal of nature's reboot from an eco dystopia to a techno nature emphasizes the destructive upshots of human negligence towards the environment. The initial depiction of the Earth presents a dystopian future of the 29<sup>th</sup> century where rampant consumerism and

ecocide have left the planet barren and uninhabitable. This portrayal serves as a stark warning about the consequences of human actions and their impact on nature. Through the lens of eco-criticism theory, the film elucidates the exploitative relationship between humanity and the environment which highlight the detrimental effects of industrialization and consumer culture. Through the protagonist, Wall.E's interactions with nature, the film showcases the inherent resilience of the natural world since he discovers a small plant amidst the desolation which becomes a symbol of hope and the catalyst for change and this moment emphasizes the importance of recognizing nature's intrinsic values and the need for ecological responsibility. As the story unfolds, Wall-E and his companion EVE, embark on a journey that challenges the current predicament of the place they inhabit. Consequently by their actions, they inspire a reconnection with nature and foster a critical examination of society's excessive technological reliance. This paradigm shift towards a harmonious coexistence between humanity and technology presents an alternative vision, wherein the environment is prioritized and protected for the sake of which human devised techno-power is employed.

The Axiom where the transformed humanity resides represents the epitome of a technologically advanced society which embodies the consequences of overreliance on technology and the detachment from the natural world. The denizens of the alternate space have grown complacent within a meticulously regulated environment, devoid of any meaningful connection to Earth. This serves as a cautionary tale highlighting the perils of severing humankind's ties with nature and the importance of maintaining a harmonious relationship with the environment. As the film progresses, Captain McCrea undergoes a transformation by Wall.E's encounters with nature and the rediscovery of the plant. The captain's realization of the aftermaths of human beings' actions and the importance of returning to Earth signifies a shift towards the ecology of hope—the paradise regained. This recuperative journey echoes the reevaluation of humanity's relationship with the environment and the possibility of positive change.

The transition from the idyllic Garden of Eden to earthly existence which is similar to the plot of the movie *Wall.E*, represents a metaphorical decline brought on by human carelessness and self-interest. In a similar vein, the human migration to the alternate space in this film reflects this historical shift and emphasizes the effects of negligence and egocentrism. To prevent a further decline of human civilization on Earth, environmental conservation must be given top priority in today's world.

Additionally, the eco-technology concept in *Wall.E*, the preservation of indigenous practices as depicted in *Avatar*, the fall of man and the obliteration of perfect harmony between humankind and nature by Satan in Milton's "Paradise Lost" and the reflection of humanity's deadly sins in *Wall.E* underscore the need for sustainable practices, responsible eco-engineering and a deep respect for the natural world. It calls for a renewed commitment to indigenous wisdom, sustainable practices and the preservation of nature for the benefit of present and future generations. *Wall.E* acts as a clarion call urging humankind to reflect on the role as custodians of the planet which shows the interconnectedness between humanity and nature failing of which would be disastrous. Through its promise of redemption and renewal at the end, this movie instills a sense of hope and inspires individuals to engage in proactive measures towards a more eco-centric future. This cinematic narrative contemplates the notion of technonature challenging and disrupting the traditional dichotomy between nature and science which not only emphasizes the potential of technology to mitigate the detrimental impacts of human activity on the environment but also maintains an inevitable nexus between humanity and the natural world which prompts a reevaluation of one's roles as custodians of the planet and propels humankind towards sustainable practices. Through meticulous human efforts to realize this ideology, harmonious coexistence with the natural world can be fostering a sense of responsibility and the aspiration for a more eco-friendly enabled and enlightened future. Thus, it is a heartening and welcome move that the tinsel world today is shifting its focus from using the films as a medium for recreation to socially

responsible eco-friendly ventures to save the Earth from man created catastrophes. As quoted by Robert Swan, "The greatest threat to our planet is the belief that someone else will save it". So we, the human beings are accountable for both the flourishing and depletion of the resources promised by the Mother Nature and every action of each individual has an impact on the Earth we live in. Therefore, it is a high time for humankind to rejuvenate and revive the gradual degradation of environment for which movies like *Wall.E* serve as an eye opener by offering a futuristic vision of today's pixelated world.

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