



Human Apathy towards Animals in the Novels of Ernest Hemingway in the Light of Eco-Criticism

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Abstract

The present research paper aims at making a critical study of human ignorance towards the feelings of non-human living beings. Ernest Hemingway's novels like *The Old Man and the Sea* and *The Sun Also Rises* offer much scope to the critical study of human apathy towards animals through eco-critical perspective.

Key Words: ecocriticism, eco-centric, environment, apathetic attitude

Ernest Hemingway was a writer with the undisputed competence to create a new literary world. American literature cannot be imagined without him. So is the impact of this creative literary artist on it along with the world literature. The entire world of his writings is based on his adventurous spirit.

While examining the human apathy towards animals in the novels of Ernest Hemingway in the light of eco-criticism, it is apt to have a quick and short glance at the theory of ecocriticism. Ecocriticism is a critical interpretation of a work of art from an eco-critical perspective. Literary works are studied in the light of disastrous and constructive effects on nature they produce and thereby positive environmental change is sought. The deterioration of the environmental values and the related problems like the harm to biodiversity generate special interest among the eco-critics.

Ernst Heinrich Haeckel made the use of the term ecology in 1876 for the first time. The term 'ecological' was first used by Karl Kroeber in 1974. While William Rueckert coined the term ecocriticism in 1978 in his essay "Literature and Ecology:

An Experiment in Ecocriticism," and emphasizes that "ecology has the greatest relevance to the present and future of the world we all live".¹

William Rueckert seems to assert the relevance of the theory of ecocriticism in order to maintain a safe and sound environment. However, the contribution of Cheryll Glotfelty in bringing the theory of eco-criticism to limelight is beyond doubt significant. *The Eco-criticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* published in 1996 by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm is the seed-work of the theory of eco-criticism. As an initiator of this approach she believes, 'Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment'.² In *The Environmental Imagination*, Buell declares that "the study must be conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis".³ Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between humans and nonhuman beings; living organisms and the environment as presented in the literary works. In other words, the investigation and examination of the relationship between literature and the environment from the ecological perspective is to make an analysis of

environmental conditions, and reach the probable solutions for the betterment of environment.

The main themes of Hemingway's short stories and novels are consistently related to human association with nature and sensational issues like wild life, nature symbols and imagery, biodiversity, surroundings, atmosphere, adverse effects of war on nature, human cruelty towards animals, etc., and these are today regarded as ecology or green studies. In most of his fictional works, whether it is *The Old Man and the Sea*, or *The Sun Also Rises*, the leading subject matter seems to be eco-centric.

A number of implicit and explicit ecological ideas and values find expression and assertion at various spots across Hemingway's fictional works. He seems to imply the need of the increasing wakefulness and understanding in the human society for the safety and conservation of both wild life and physical environmental world. Hemingway appears alert and conscious about animals and natural resources. As a matter of fact, he seems to take the position of an eco-writer showing concern for the much needed freedom of wild animal.

Hemingway voices his protest against the maltreatment meted out to nonhuman beings by the humans. He seems to oppose the human domination and the resultant exploitation, persecution, and merciless killings of animals at the heartless hands of people. Hemingway implies his anguish against the undisputed supremacy of humans over nonhuman creatures. He, in many of his fictional works, discloses the dark reality of human world behind the curtain of ostentatious sympathy for the nonhuman living beings.

Ernest Hemingway seeks to draw the attention to the bullfighting, which involves much bloodshed and cruelty. He underscores the fact of how bullfighting has posed a danger to life of an animal, since it involves brutal killings of innocent bulls. Such violence engenders imbalance and a state of disharmony, which in turn generate certain problem disturbing the whole environment. He sheds some light on the cynic nature of people, who inhumanly enjoy such cruel and fierce games as the unsympathetic and pitiless spectators. This is undoubtedly a serious threat to the bond

between human and wild. This is a critical problem of environment. Bullfight, according to Hemingway in his nonfiction work entitled *Death in the Afternoon*, is not sport but tragedy, i.e., not an equal contest between the man and the bull but one "in which there is danger for the man but certain death for the animal".⁴

*Ernest Hemingway lays bare the false affection of humans for the nonhuman beings in his novel The Old Man and the Sea. The old man expresses deep feelings of love for the trapped marline. The fish is giant. His behavior, according to Santiago, is highly dignified and noble. The old man goes to the extent of declaring that no man deserves quality to claim the flesh of the fish. But despite all his sympathy and affection for the fish, the old man blatantly and unfeelingly exhibits his resolution to kill the fish. His determination to slay the huge marline in spite of love for him discloses his hidden egocentric intent to use the fish for personal benefit. It means to man his self-interest is above the life of animals. The old man, therefore, says to the fish, "I love you and respect you very much. But I will kill you dead before this day ends".*⁵

Ernest Hemingway seems to raise the issue of human indifference towards the animals. Hemingway realizes that the gap is widening between human and nonhuman creatures due to the cruel and unfeeling treatment given to the latter by the former. If the picture will remain the same even in times to come, there may arise an ecological imbalance in the environment. This may turn out to be a critical problem of environment, because the presence of both the human beings and non-human beings in balance is the need of nature. But the apathetic attitude of people towards the dumb creatures in modern world has raised a question mark before the existence of the latter. The callous living style of human beings has caused a serious threat to the existence of some species of animals, while some others have already become extinct.

Hemingway's attitude towards bullfighting is that of an opponent, as he seems to show his strong disapproval of it in *The Sun Also Rises*. Jake Barnes, one of the important characters of the novel, talks to a waiter at Pamplona about the recent

unfortunate incidence during a bullfight, in which a peasant was killed by a bull. But the waiter feels no feelings for the dead peasant, rather he thinks of this tragic incidence as a matter of fun. Hemingway presents the conversation between the waiter and Jake Barnes as:

“ A big wound. All for fun. Just for fun. What do you think of that?”

“I don’t know’

“That’s it. All for fun you understand.”

“You are not an aficionado?”

“Me? What are bulls? Animals. Brute animals.” He stood up and put his hand on the small of his back. Right through the back. A cornada right through the back. For fun-you understand.”

He shook his head and walked away.⁽⁶⁾

People have lost their feelings for the innocent killings during the bullfights. Their hearts have become stony. The man has nothing to do with the killings of either the bulls or the bull-fighters. It is just a matter of fun and cynic enjoyment for him. Through this small conversation, Hemingway seems to affirm his strong opposition to such a cruel and inhuman sport, where life loses its importance and only violence and bloodshed dominate the entire scene.

Hemingway’s old man, in his novel *The Old Man and the sea*, brings forth the tragic image of the fighting cocks, which continue to fight even after they have lost their eyes in the course of fierce and brutal fight. Hemingway wants to make the unfeeling world realize the agonies of dumb animals by describing such pathetic incidences in his novels and short stories.

Ernest Hemingway raises ecological values to the level of a specific universal appeal in *The Old Man and the Sea* and *The Sun Also Rises*. His account of human apathy toward the animals has today turned a subject of serious contemplation for all mankind. Hemingway seems to emerge as an eco-conscious writer in the sense that his fictional works incorporate descriptions of events and incidences which present a pathetic picture of the predicament

of animals caused by none other than hardhearted humanity. Ecological concerns as manifested in Hemingway’s novels and short stories are as important and significant to him as they are to the environmentalists of today. An apathetic attitude of man towards the animals is a big threat to the ecological balance. Hemingway therefore presents the account of such events in his fictional works, which focus on cruelties and other maltreatments given to animals, so that the people will realize the responsibility to provide a safe and sound environment to the fellow nonhuman beings. His ecological perception of nature is, indeed, comprehensive, perpetual, and appealing worldwide.

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