

ECOPHOBIA FROM A POSTCOLONIAL POINT OF VIEW IN TREASURE ISLAND AND "JACK AND THE BEANSTALK": A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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ABSTRACT: *This study aims at analyzing the ecophobia in Stevenson's Treasure Island and Jacobs's "Jack and the Beanstalk" from a postcolonial point of view. Both literary works reflect how the colonizers fear the colonized's nature due to the ideological and cultural conflicts between the colonizers and the colonized. The two works emphasize the idea that the colonizers' ecophobia is also a result of the western negative stereotypes about the colonized people and their nature, in which the colonized are portrayed as uncivilized and frightening. The study methodology is based on the comparative close reading analysis. The study concludes that the ecophobia in both the literary works is a reaction to the negative colonial stereotypes about the colonized and to the ideological and cultural conflict between the colonizers and the colonized.*

KEYWORDS: Ecophobia, postcolonial, colonial, ideological and cultural conflict, ecocriticism, educational purposes, negative stereotypes, uncivilized

INTRODUCTION

There are many studies that tackle ecophobia in literature, particularly the colonial and postcolonial literary studies. For example, Estok (2005) defines ecophobia as "an irrational, often hysterical, and groundless hatred of the natural world, or aspects of it" (112). Additionally, it is obvious in the discussion of ecophobia in the colonial writings that the colonialists' discourse portrays the colonized as those dangerous and fearful people who are in need of being civilized. Edward Said in his book entitled Orientalism (1994) points out that "every single empire in its official discourse has said that it is not like all the others,... that it has a mission to enlighten, civilize, bring order and democracy and that it uses force only as a last resort" (xvi).

Ecophobia is always studied in the domain of postcolonial literature. Deane Curtin highlights the strong relationship between postcolonial literature and the ecocriticism of which ecophobia is a branch (7). Also, Rob Nixon emphasizes the strong connectedness between postcolonialism and environmentalism, in which the colonizers claim that the colonizers in their attempts to colonize the new lands distorted the fact by claiming that the colonized's lands are empty (235).

Moreover, Nadine Sinno highlights the shared thread between postcolonial writings and ecocritical ones by saying that this bondage "highlights the connections between the exploitation of nature and the enterprise of colonialism" (110). Also, Frantz Fanon emphasizes the importance of nature and land for the colonized people: "For a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and, above all dignity" (9). Huggan and Tiffin point out that in order to study

the ecocritical writings from a postcolonial point of view, the critic should "explore how different cultural understandings of society and nature understandings necessarily inflected by ongoing experiences of colonialism, sexism, and racism have been deployed in specific historical moments by writers in the making of their art" (15).

The colonizers' attempts to colonize the new lands result in aggressive and oppressive acts against the colonized's nature. Lesile Gray claims that "you cannot have sanity without sane relationships with your environment" (qtd. in Roszak 1995, 178). Additionally, there were many writers who blame those who distort nature and deal with it irrationally. Thus, this paper explores the ecophobia in both Stevenson's *Treasure Island* and Jacobs's "Jack and the Beanstalk" from a postcolonial point of view shedding light on how the protagonists in both works view the other or the colonized. The significance of this study stems from its concentration on the colonizers' fear of the colonized's nature which is based on colonial agendas and misconceptions about the colonized. The two works reflect how the colonizers perceive the colonized's nature based on their negative stereotypes about the colonized. In sum, the two novels have a common ground which is the colonizers' negative views or conceptions about the nature of the colonized. This negative attitude was reflected in the colonial writings which depict the colonized's nature as fearful and gothic.

Ecophobia in *Treasure Island* and "Jack and the Beanstalk"

In Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (2008), the protagonist Jim reveals his fears about Ben Gunn who is one of the cannibals living on the island he explores. Jim is extremely frightened from seeing that cannibal who was an animal-like person living on the island:

From the side of the hill, which was here steep and stony, a spout of gravel was dislodged, and fell rattling and bounding through the trees. My eyes turned instinctively in that direction, and I saw a figure leap with great rapidity behind the trunk of a pine. What it was, whether bear or man or monkey, I could in no wise tell. It seemed dark and shaggy; more I knew not. But the terror of this new apparition brought me to a stand (81).

Thus, it seems that Ben Gunn is portrayed as a part of this ecological system which is not familiar to Jim. Ben Gunn behaves as an uncivilized person because he belongs to that wild world in which the survival is for the fittest. Jim's depiction of Ben Gunn's image as a wild animal living in the wilderness and behaving like other animals in the forest reveals the ideological and cultural clash between the British society and the other people living in the remote islands. His fear is due to the unfamiliarity with this natural world which is, to him, uncivilized and barbarian. To Jim, any native person living in this island is a source of fear and gothic.

It should be noted here that Jim in his depiction of Ben Gunn reflects how the British colonialists at the era of colonialization and imperialism viewed the other peoples living in the distant and uncivilized areas in the world. The similarity that Jim makes here between Ben Gunn's appearance and the behaviors of other animals in the island makes us think that the British consider the colonized people living in the remote areas like a part of this ecological system which is viewed with fear.

Jim's fears of the view of Ben Gunn and the ecological setting he lives in start to accelerate because of his unfamiliarity with the colonized setting which represents to him the senses of fear and gothic:

I was now, it seemed, cut off upon both sides; behind me the murderers, before me this lurking nondescript. And immediately I began to prefer the dangers I knew to those I knew not. Silver himself appeared less terrible in contrast with this creature of the woods, and I turned on my heel, and, looking sharply behind me over my shoulder, began to retrace my steps in the direction of the boats (81).

Obviously, Jim is shocked and frightened of seeing that cannibal who is portrayed in a very frightening way in terms of its existence in the woods. Jim highlights his fears of this cannibal because of his inability to view it clearly. He fears everything on the island because the nature is not familiar to him. He cannot conform to this natural setting because of the previous stereotypes stored in his mind about the other. That is why he considers this creature a source of danger to him and the pirates less dangerous than the cannibal.

Jim's attempt to avoid encountering with this creature reflects how the early British colonialists were cautious and careful about exploring the new areas they investigate. He prefers the danger of the pirates to the danger of the new lands because he is influenced by the imperialistic culture that portrayed the people in the other regions of the world as mysterious and frightening.

It is worth mentioning here that Stevenson highlights Jim's fear of the unknown nature because he wants to draw the readers' attention to the colonialists' fear of the lands they wanted to explore. This fear or ecophobia is due to the cultural and ideological clash or conflict between the colonizers and the colonized. This conflict makes Jim think that this creature belongs to this wild nature that makes him appear as an animal to him and to the readers.

Jim's comparison he makes between Ben Gunn and other animals living in the island is obvious when he describes his physical appearance and motion:

Instantly the figure reappeared, and, making a wide circuit, began to head me off. I was tired, at any rate; but had I been as fresh as when I rose. I could see it was in vain for me to contend in speed with such an adversary. From trunk to trunk the creature flitted like a deer, running manlike on two legs, but unlike any man that I had ever seen, stopping almost double as it ran. Yet a man it was, I could no longer be in doubt about that (81).

The depiction of Ben Gunn in the previous quotation as a man and a wild animal emphasizes the idea how Jim views the other in his British colonial culture, in which the other is characterized as odd, uncivilized, and barbarian. Ben Gunn, the cannibal, behaves like an animal because he is a part of this ecological system he lives in. On the contrary, Jim is unable to comprehend this fact because he is influenced by what his culture teaches him. Jim is driven by his fear of this new environment because he is incapable of understanding the new environmental system of which Ben Gunn is a part of.

It should be emphasized that Jim's ecophobia in the previous quotation is partly due to his careful investigation of the new environment. This is a way that the colonialists use whenever they explore a new area. The fear in their psyches is a way of avoiding any danger or obstacle they might encounter with. However, Jim's depiction of Ben Gunn's behaviors and motion reveals that this fear is also caused by the inherently negative stereotypes that the British colonizers root in the new explorers' minds about the colonized ones.

Furthermore, Jim's encounter with Ben Gunn reveals how he fears the other and how his fear is driven by the ideological clash between the colonizers and the colonized:

I began to recall what I heard of cannibals. I was within an ace of calling for help. But the mere fact that he was a man, however wild, had somewhat reassured me, and my fear of Silver began to revive in proportion. I stood still, therefore, and cast about for some method of escape; and as I was so thinking, the recollection of my pistol flashed into my mind. As soon as I remembered I was not defenceless, courage glowed again in my heart, and I set my face resolutely for this man of the island, and walked briskly towards him (81).

Commenting on the encounter between Jim and Ben Gunn in the previous quotation, it should be noted that Jim relies in his view to Ben Gunn on the previous stereotypes about the cannibals that they are dangerous and uncivilized. Firstly, he gets frightened from Ben Gunn because of what he was instructed by the British culture about them, but later Jim becomes determined on encountering with Ben Gunn as an attempt to prove his existence on the island. In other words, although Jim thinks about escaping from the scene because of his fear of Ben Gunn, he insists on encountering with him because he wants to prove that the British colonialists were brave with their battle with the colonized. This encounters between Jim and Ben Gunn is a tool employed by the author for educational purposes, in which the colonizers or explorers should arm themselves with the tools of battling with the colonized. One of these tools is the fear and carefulness of not encountering the colonized or the other directly.

Additionally, the ecophobia employed in this novel serves the colonizers to avoid being harmed by the colonized because such risk might halt the colonizers from achieving their goals and agendas. Moreover, it should be emphasized here that the encounter between Jim and Ben Gunn in this novel implies the ideological and cultural clash between the British colonizers who avoid being in a direct clash with the colonized. This ideological and cultural conflict justifies the ecophobia in this novel, in which in order to achieve the colonial agendas by Jim, he is required to fear the mysterious things and people in the remote places and to view the colonized's nature as a setting full of fear and gothic.

In comparison with Jacobs's "Jack and the Beanstalk," we see how the poor boy Jack reveals his fear of the new place he explores when he sees that ogre whose favorite meal is to eat the English boys:

So Jack climbed, and he climbed...till at last he reached the sky. And when he got there he found a long broad road going as straight as a dart. So he walked along...till he came to a great big tall house, and on the doorstep there was a great big tall woman...[she said] My man is an ogre and there's nothing he likes better than boys broiled on toast. You'd better be moving on or he'll soon be coming (qtd. in Hamdi & DeAngelis 13).

Thus, it is noted from the very beginning that there will be a kind of clash between the boy and the ogre. The ogre is portrayed in a frightening way when he likes to eat the boys. This is a kind of warning to the English boys to be aware of the remote places they plan to explore or visit. But the warning here is implicit to the new English colonizers who plan to explore the new lands. The writers in the English colonial expansion period were highly interested in writing cautionary tales to the new generation of the colonizers. There was an instructional agenda behind portraying the other in a negative and frightening way in order to train the new generation of colonizers to be more prepared and careful about the new nature they explore. Jack's depiction of the ogre reveals how frightening he was. The ogre is portrayed as the monster who likes to eat the enemy. The significant point in the depiction is how the ogre can smell "the blood of an Englishman":

He was a big one, to be sure. At his belt he had three calves strung up by the heels, and he unhooked them and threw them down on the table and said: 'Here, wife, broil me a couple of these for breakfast. Ah! What's this smell? Fee-fi-fo-fum, I smell the blood of an Englishman, Be he alive, or be he dead I'll have his bones to grind my bread.' (qtd. in Hamdi & DeAngelis 13, 14).

It is obvious that the ogre's physical appearance is gothic. He is portrayed as an aggressive person who is uncivilized. He is like Ben Gunn in *Treasure Island* who appears as a cannibal. The most important point is the ogre's aggressive tendency towards the Englishmen. He seems in a conflict with them and considers them as his enemies who come to his world to steal its resources. That is why he mentions them by name here and insists on defeating them.

Additionally, the writer of this story insists on highlighting the ideological clash between the ogre and the British by portraying the aggressiveness of the ogre towards the English men. It is noted that the portrayal of the ogre in the previous quotation is biased to the English one because he is depicted as an uncivilized and evil person instead of investigating the reasons that make him adopt this tendency against the English. Here it should be emphasized that in the colonial writings and propaganda the colonizers are portrayed as the victims and the colonized as the victimizers.

Like the colonizers, Jack's greed is obvious in his attempts to steal the gold and the golden hen owned by the ogre. He does not view his act of stealing as an illegal one because his view of the other is negative. So that is why he keeps trying to steal the ogre's resources. On the contrary, the ogre is depicted as that naïve and uncivilized person who is just interested in his gold and sleeping:

All happened as it did before. In came the ogre as he did before, said: 'fee-Fi-fo-fum,' and had his breakfast of three broiled oxen. Then he said: 'Wife, bring me the hen that lays the golden eggs.' So she brought it, and the ogre said: 'lay,' and it laid an egg all of gold. And then the ogre began to nod his head, and to snore till the house shook (qtd. in Hamdi & DeAngelis 14).

The previous quotation sheds light on an important idea that the ogre is portrayed as an inactive person who is naïve. He seems to us that person who owns the gold and resources without

being that hard worker in life. What he is interested in is getting the gold, eating and sleeping. However, Jack is portrayed that young boy who is clever and active in making his living with all the means in life. This portrayal is important to reflect the gulf between the colonizers who are always shrewd and clever and the colonized who are lazy and foolish.

What intensifies the negative portrayal of the ogre in the story is his wife's deception to him. The writer of the story hints to an idea that even the woman figure in the story helps the boy because she does not like her husband. It might be due to her hatred of being subjugated and suppressed by the ogre who always deals with her as an obedient person to him. He is portrayed that person who keeps giving her orders to prepare food without making her feel that she is his partner in life. This tense relationship between the ogre and his wife is clear when she says to him "There you are again with your fee-fi-fo-fum. Why of course it's the boy you caught last night that I've just broiled for your breakfast. How forgetful I am, and how careless you are not to know the difference between live and dead after all these years." qtd. in Hamdi & DeAngelis 15).

Jack's shrewdness is contrasted with the ogre's silliness when he steals the gold from the ogre. He knows how to run away and how to control his fear of the ogre in an irrational way:

Then Jack lifted up the copper-lid very quietly and got down like a mouse and crept on hands and knees till he came to the table when up he crawled, caught hold of the golden harp and dashed with it towards the door...and ogre woke up just in time to see Jack running off with his harp. Jack ran as fast as he could, and the ogre came rushing after, and would soon have caught him only Jack had a start and dodged him a bit and knew where he was going (qtd. in Hamdi & DeAngelis 15).

Here it should be noted how Jack's ecophobia is controlled in a clever way that enables him to run away and to avoid the ogre's danger. On the contrary, the ogre is depicted as a rash person who does not count his steps rationally. Again this portrayal is significant because it depicts the colonized as rash and foolish whereas the colonizers as smart and rational.

Furthermore, the defeat of the ogre by Jack hints to the ideological conflict between the colonizer and the colonized. Jack is able to rescue himself and his gold by chopping the beanstalk on which the ogre was climbing, whereas the ogre's rashness and irrationality lead to his death and defeat. Jack entertains the sources he gets from the ogre's world and lives with his mother a happy life:

But Jack jumped down and got hold of the axe and gave a chop at the beanstalk which cut it half in two. The ogre felt the beanstalk shake and quiver so he stopped to see what was the matter. Then Jack gave another chop with the axe, and the beanstalk was cut in two and began to topple over. Then the ogre fell down and broke his crown, and the beanstalk came toppling after. Then Jack showed his mother his golden harp, and what with showing that and selling the golden eggs, Jack and his mother became very rich, and he married a great princess, and they lived happy ever after (qtd. in Hamdi & DeAngelis 16).

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the ecophobia in both novels is used by the colonizers to serve many purposes, such as the avoidance of risks that the colonizers might encounter in their exploration of the colonized's areas and the educational purposes that aim at preparing the new generations of colonizers to be well armed with a lot of knowledge about the colonized and their nature. Thus, it should be emphasized that the colonizers use this technique in their writings to serve their colonial aims when colonizing new lands and nations. In sum, ecophobia reflects the ideological and cultural clash between the colonizers and the colonized because the colonizers view the colonized's nature mysterious and gothic, while the colonized view the colonizers as those enemies who come to steal their land and sources. Through the colonizers' ecophobia we can note how they relate the nature and the people of the colonized lands to the negative stereotypes rooted in their minds about the colonized and their nature.

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