



More Human/Humane than Humans: An Ecocritical Analysis of Shahryar's "Hail to Heydarbaba"

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Abstract

Ecocriticism is a rather new insight into the relationship between literature and environment. In recent years, different environmental problems and devastations have led the critics to focus on the ecocritical concepts and terms in order to highlight the environmental challenges in literary works. In Iran, many poets investigate the natural environment in their poems, but still there is not the much ecocritical analysis on them. The researchers have chosen a contemporary Iranian poet, Shahryar (1906-1988), as the central figure of this study and examine his masterpiece, "Hail to Heydarbaba", under ecocritical perspectives. This poem is the material of the present study, to which we try to apply the ecocritical terms, such as anthropocentrism, anthropomorphism, ecocentrism, modernization, and place attachment. The writers attempt to settle on the particular aspects of ecocriticism in order to explore the poet's unique expression of ecocentric views for illustrating his appreciation of the non-human world.

Keywords: ecocriticism, anthropocentrism, anthropomorphism, ecocentrism, modernization, place attachment.

1. Introduction

Nowadays ecocriticism is considered as one of the significant approaches to the critical analysis of literary works all over the world because of its emphasis on the relationship between literature and environment. It may lead to a new insight into the natural crises through literary works. Nature and its effects on man's life are the concerns of many poetical works. Iranian poets have expressed their sincere emotions to the environment, on a greater scale and their surroundings, on a smaller one, through different eras. Seyyed Mohammad Hossein Behjat Tabrizi, mostly known with his pseudonym Shahryar, a contemporary Iranian poet, has also stated his concerns about the stability of the environment and the threatening factors to it.

Concerning the poet's biography, the writers deem it necessary to mention that Shahryar born in 1906 in Khoshgnab, Tabriz. Shahryar's masterpiece "Hail to Heydarbaba" (1953) is in Turkish language and about his childhood memories; it addresses Mount Heydarbaba as his listener. Shahryar with a great eagerness describes the mild nature very meticulously. About the style of Shahryar's poetry, we may say that one of its major qualities is his frankness in wording. In his poetic style, he uses subtle, simple, and smooth language in order to be understood by many readers. Shahryar's use of colloquial phrases is the feature that makes it easy to comprehend. For him, creating a pure image from the nature and turning it into a memorable scene in the readers' minds is so crucial. His powerful imagination was a device to build the elegant and brilliant scenes of nature with scrupulous vision.

In a library-based research, five fundamental concepts of ecocriticism, like anthropocentrism, anthropomorphism, ecocentrism, modernization, and place attachment have been selected to be analyzed in regard to the poem "Hail to Heydarbaba". In the first section of the argument, anthropocentrism vs. ecocentrism, the researchers try to find out the value that the poet gives to the non-human and the human in order to see which one is more significant in his eyes. In the section of anthropomorphism, we seek the human characteristics ascribed to the mountain in the poem that are supposed to make ecocentric points. Then, the consequences of modernization on the non-human world attract our attention in "Hail to Heydarbaba". At last, place attachment indicates the emotional ties to the native land and the pro-environmental behavior. About the significance of this study, it could be said that through an ecocritical reading of Shahryar's poems, readers can understand the challenges of the salvation of nature, generally, and in the poet's mind, specifically. Concerning the literature review, we found no previous ecocritical analysis of any Persian poet in local databases.

2. Definition of Key Terms

2.1 Anthropocentrism

Being the antonym of ecocentrism, it signifies the assumption that human interests are of higher priority than non-humans'. Anthropocentrism includes a couple of positions: Strong anthropocentrism believes "human interests should prevail" while the weak stance holds "zero-degree anthropocentrism is not feasible or desirable" (Buell 134).

2.2 Anthropomorphism

The attribution of human features or feelings to natural objects, landscapes, and phenomena is called anthropomorphism. The use of anthropomorphic literary strategies is a way for projection of man's desire to make nature sympathize with human kind; or, oppositely, it might be done in the interest of dramatizing the claims or plight of the natural world (Buell 134).

2.3 Ecocentrism

As mentioned above, ecocentrism is the opposite angle of anthropocentrism, maintaining the "view in environmental ethics that the interest of ecosphere must override that of the interest of individual species". It underlines the intrinsic value of the non-human world and points to the interconnection between the organismal and the inanimate (Buell 137).

2.4 Place Attachment

The phrase "place attachment" alludes to the emotional bonds people have to particular sites (Bailey, Kearns, and Livingston 1; Altman and Low 2). Attention to locales, for the ecocritics, may lead to a sense of affiliation to them that may result in not only literary awareness of their significance, the protection of the places, but the pro-environmental behavior (Van Noy xvi; Gifford and Scannel 1).

3. Argument

3.1 Anthropocentrism vs. Ecocentrism

Anthropocentric behavior is commonly introduced as the primary reason for the environmental crisis. Ignoring the rights of non-humans and knowing themselves superior to nature, human beings let themselves destroy the environment for their sake. Through technological development and modernization, they consider its capacity as instrumental for their own goals:

Environmentalists who subscribe to ecocentrism maintain that until the ecosphere itself is recognized as the common ground of all human activities, human beings will continue to put their interests first, thereby undermining more healthy and sustainable ways of living. As an environmental ethos, ecocentrism holds that human civilization and urbanization have obscured our intimate connection with the natural world and its ecological purposes. (Uebel 133)

Shahryar declares his dissatisfaction with treating of the nature in a dishonoring way to indicate his ecocentric sensibility toward the modern culture.

Heydarbaba Gara Chiman's road
The sound of pilgrims' reciting
May all the troubles of Karbala pilgrim
Fall in the eyes of the greedy ones
We are misled by the lies of the civilization.¹ (51-55)

In these lines, the poet implies that the new civilization has caused the destruction of traditions and the old way of life in the given society. He expresses his dissatisfaction with the new age of industry that erases the sincerity and peace among people and leads to the decline of religious, ethical concepts and to the decadence of humanistic values, such as the pilgrimage to Karbala. The loss of tranquility and peace is the result of the new civilization that causes man's ignorance to the non-human. In fact, by addressing Heydarbaba, Shahryar complains about his time blindness to the nature and accuses the new civilization of being the reason for forgetting the simple way of life in the heart of nature. Ecocentric theorists postulate that the present ecological crisis stems from what Ehrenfeld calls the "arrogance of humanism" (cited in Beckman et al. 3). This pride is felt in the ignoring of the absolute rights of the environment and in replacing modernity and its systems of values in daily lives of men.

The ideas mentioned above are the core opinions of the poet about the adverse effects of civilization on the relationship between the non-human world and men. As Shahryar points out, "the lies of civilization" have concealed the reality of the natural environment. Thus, one of the significant aspects of anthropocentrism, which is the domination over nature by technology, is the poet's main complaint in "Hail to Heydarbaba". Modern civilization is the sign of anthropocentric worldview because of the importance it gives to the human world and sprawl of cities with neglecting the non-human world rights through instrumental view. In this point of view, the environment is served for the profit-seeking purposes

¹ . All English Translations are from "Hail to Heydarbaba"
<http://www.umich.edu/~turkish/links/manuscripts/haydarbaba/haydarbaba.html> by Gholamreza Sabri Tabrizi.

of the human universe without concerning the rights of fauna and flora, animals and plants. When the poet states that the beauties of civilization have mesmerized people, in fact, he expresses his ecocentric sensibility and warns his readers about the consequences of exploiting the surrounding environment by the "eyes of the greedy". Thus, Shahryar's agitation for the reality of civilization and its lies to human depicts his considerations about the nature and can be a warning to awake the readers to have pro-environmental behavior in a modern era.

Heydarbaba the geese of Guri Lake,
 The musical melody of the wind at twisted highways,
 The summer and autumn seasons of the village,
 Are like moving pictures in front of my eyes
 I sit and watch them within myself. (46-50)

These lines depict the ecocentric vision of the poet because of the detailed descriptions of the natural scenes. When Shahryar mentions "the geese of Guri Lake" or "the musical melody of the wind" in fact, he tries to transfer the sense of pure natural environment in the minds of readers. There is no trace of humans and their world. There is no sign of power system between people and the non-human world. The reader can see the pure natural facts overall. The non-human world constitutes the primary description in these lines. By describing a simple way of life in the heart of nature, the poet evokes the sense of sympathy for nature and arouses feelings of sorrow for the old days within the minds of readers. By stating "like moving pictures in front of my eyes", in fact, the poet depicts the effects of natural scenes on his soul to the extent that still these natural scenes exist in his mind and soul like a great movie. The ideas mentioned above indicate the interdependency of man and the non-human world where natural scenes can give tranquility and peace of mind to the human beings while they are on the skirt of Mother Nature. The dependency of men on the natural environment for receiving comfort and peace confirms the ecocentric vision of Shahryar. The presence of geese in a lake also shows the ecocentric perspective. When the poet admires the scene of a goose in a lake, in fact, he merely admires and honors the reality of the non-human world. Shahryar's view toward the natural environment is not a mere ornamental background for his poem rather it is the primary foundation of his poem. In terms of ecocentrism, Shahryar's typically advertent and intimate attitude regarding the natural environment and its elements depicts his profound considerations about the non-human universe.

May the Dashlibulakh spring not be filled with gravel
 May its orchards not fade away
 May not passersby on horses ever be thirsty there
 Convey good luck to the running spring
 While watching horizons with sleeping eyes. (71-75)

These lines indicate Shahryar's intimacy with the landscape. The poet's affection for the natural elements seems to pervade the expressions like, "may the Dashlibulakh spring not be filled with gravel" or "may its orchards not fade away". Shahryar's preference for describing the detailed scenes of the natural environment over humans' selfish deeds in the realm of nature reflects his adoration of the non-human universe. What matter to Shahryar in these lines are the real scenes from nature in which he transfers the sense of freshness to the readers. This sense evokes the sense of admiration and praise toward the natural environment in the minds of readers, which eventually lead to creating a sense of responsibility to keep this freshness alive in nature. In fact, the intrinsic value of nature is accentuated by the poet in these lines and from ecocentric vision it leads to loving nature for its sake, not for the instrumental purposes of human beings.

From the biographical background of the poet, it is clear that Shahryar's love of nature is not abstract but it involves landscape experiences in the natural environment. When he mentions that "may not passersby on horses ever be thirsty there", in fact the poet remembers his memories in the heart of nature in springs that were full of fresh water and were the source of water for passersby who were in need of water in the hot days of summer. Shahryar wishes the eternal ferment for the spring and thus appreciates the very self of the spring as a member of the non-human universe just as he desires an extended life for a human being.

Ecocentric perspectives are vivid in the ideas and manner of the poet. One can even claim that none of his lines traces the superiority of human's interests. Since Shahryar develops an ethical and conservative approach toward the natural environment in his poem, he encourages his readers to be aware of the intrinsic value of nature and to respect the natural rights of the non-human universe.

3.2 *Anthropomorphism*

Shahryar addresses the Mount Heydarbaba in his poem and expresses his complaints and pure feelings to it as if the mountain had eyes to see and ears to hear his grievances toward the nature and its elements.

Heydarbaba may you be fortunate
 Be surrounded with springs and orchards

May you live long after us
 The world is paved with events, deaths, and losses
 This world has long been childless and an orphan! (17-21)

He ascribes humanistic qualities to Heydarbaba in these lines and gives it sentiments and life in order to communicate with this natural factor. When the poet mentions, "may you live long after us", from ecocritical point of view, it indicates how the relationship between he and she is an outstanding point in these lines. The poet wishes a long life for the mountain just as he wishes a long life for his beloved family members and asks it to remember him when a natural coincidence befalls. Through the communication with Heydarbaba, Shahryar polishes his soul and feelings and opens out his heart to it about his apprehensions of his own time. This is the unique aspect of his poem that expounds his considerations to a mountain as a live, hearing ear. This image immediately rings the bell in the reader's mind, reminding him/her of the echo of one's words when enclosed by a chain of mountains, which can signify its vivid quality. Therefore, applying this strategy, addressing on the side of the man and responding on the side of the mountain, the poet magnifies the role of the non-human universe; he adds emphasis by wishing it a long life, even more than himself: "after us ... deaths, and losses". The poet aspires a long-lasting life for the mountain because he believes in the intrinsic value of the natural environment.

Heydarbaba may you always be cheerful
 Your mouth enjoy good fare
 Your table be open to both friends and strangers
 Tell the world that my poet son Shahryar
 Has sorrow piled upon sorrow in all his days. (380-85)

In these lines, the poet tries to indicate an interactive egalitarianism between the human and non-human worlds, which leads to a reciprocal relationship. This is the essential element for the permanent safety of the environment. Ascribing the adjectives like "cheerful" to it, Shahryar highlights the world's intrinsic value without paying attention to its instrumental use; on the contrary, what he implores the mountain to do for him is playing the role of a compassionate companion who can heal his "sorrows". This accreditation to the existence of intrinsic value in nature leads to protecting or at least preventing harmful actions, and this is what the poet wants to transfer to his readers: "Tell the world". Environmental ethics emphasizes the honor of the virgin nature and all within it as a fundamental and original right and compels humans to accept. In fact, Shahryar has recognized such morals, hoping to convey them to all, whether they respect this intrinsic price or not: "open to both friends and strangers". The subtlety of Shahryar in painting the realities of the non-human world and expressing these aesthetic aspects awakes one's sense of affiliation as well as integration and makes him/her know him/herself as one of its parts, not as a separate member of an alienated society. Such a sense of responsibility and respect revives eco-consciousness of readers toward their natural surroundings. All in all, Shahryar requests Heydarbaba, just as a human being:

Heydarbaba, give birth to brave sons
 Break the necks of the wicked,
 Trap the wolves at the high way
 Let the herd freely graze in the open,
 The sheep become fat. (371-75)

He asks it to bear, bring, and breed brave children in its skirt and be powerful in front of tyrants of each time. A sense of shift in the gender of the mountain in the poet's address could be felt; in the previous excerpt, he gives it a father-like character, one who is responsible for breadwinning: "Your table be open to both friends and strangers". Then, here in this part, he turns it into a mother-like figure: "give birth to brave sons". By such a tactic, the poet not only anthropomorphizes the mountain, but also generalizes its human role to both male and female. When it comes to men, however, this anthropomorphic style becomes bolder as the poet objectifies them: "Break the necks of the wicked, / Trap the wolves" on the one hand, and "Let ... [t]he sheep" "graze in the open ... [and] become fat" on the other. Those "greedy" ones above, liars of "civilization", are described as wolves, and their opposites as sheep, symbol of innocence. This makes Mount Heydarbaba the protagonist and even more human.

3.3 Modernization

As the second wave ecocriticism "shows great interest in literatures pertaining to metropolis and industrialization" (Buell, Thornber, and Heise 419), this issue can be analyzed in Shahryar's poem. By questioning the technological progression and the devastating effect of industrialization, he tries to indicate the consequences of the absence of connection between human and nature in his poetry. He believes that modernization and industrialization can remove local communities and green landscapes; hence, he tries to show the interdependence and interrelatedness of the human and the non-human. In fact, the poet brings to the fore that different aspects of modernization are big threats to next

generations since they can lead to the loss of natural resources, through irregular exploitation of them, and lack of human values. Thus, alienation from the pure environment is the result of technological approach.

Shahryar uses simple language in his poem to create eco-consciousness in the minds of his readers about the inauspicious phenomena of modernity and industrialization. This simplicity in style per se introduces the topic of the poem that is dealing with nature, the symbol of crudity, and the opposite of the complexity of technology. Concerning the rights of the non-human world and human dependency on the environment, he expresses his deep apprehension and anxiety about modernity and notifies about its flimsy aspect. In fact, the poet admits being deceived by the manifestations of modernity and civilization. In the poet's eye, human seclusion from environment, absence of affinity and sympathy among people, and separation from the traditional way of life and the colorful nature are all the results of trusting in the process of modernity.

Heydarbaba, the skies are cloudy and misty,
Our days are worse than before,
Take care lest we be separated one from another
Goodness is taken away from us
We are left in a desolate position. (341-45)

In these lines, the poet transfers the atmosphere of modern society as "cloudy" and "misty", the two words that usually reminisce about the smoke of industries. He delineates his dissatisfaction with the increased speed of modernity and its harmful effects on human being's lives. This kind of description indicates the poet's lamentation over the detrimental influences of modernity that leads to separation and desolation in human's life. From an ecocritical viewpoint, the poet, as a person who spent his childhood in the heart of nature and is still in close relationship with it, counts the social aspects of environmental degradation by modernity. In fact, Shahryar is aware of the absence of the environmental awareness in different classes of society as a result of the new age of modernity; that is why he says "our days are worse than before". He adds,

Ask this cursed universe
What does it want from this chaos it has created?
Tell the universe to set the stars free
Let the earth turn upside down
And this satanic system be removed. (346-50)

In continuation, the poet indicates his intense discontent with modernity to the degree that he calls this phenomenon a "chaos". The poet compares the negative aspects of civilization and the social relations in the light of modernity to a "satanic system" that according to the second wave of ecocriticism suggests the relationship between the social justice and environmental degradation (Buell 24). Shahryar, in this way, exhibits that the social issues and relations are not separate from the environmental concerns. Human beings' connectedness to the nature has a direct relationship with their ethical and social commitments. As long as modernity disturbs this pure linkage, the social value system damages. Thus, the poet asks for the annihilation of modern patterns of life that have degraded human condition: "Let the earth turn upside down / And this satanic system be removed."

3.4 Place Attachment

Paying attention to places and place writings creates a sense of attentiveness to the surrounding nature and a kind of respect and responsibility toward the environment. Home, landscapes, and neighborhoods can be different places to which individuals feel attached due to their experiences in those areas. Thus, analyzing the bonds between men and locations leads to eco-consciousness and pro-environmental behavior in the readers.

Shahryar addresses Heydarbaba as his listener, shares his good memories of childhood with it and his readers, and complains about the age of civilization to the mountain. One of the noteworthy features of this poem is the significance of Heydarbaba as a witness to the poet's personal and social life. He spent his childhood in Khoshgnab village in the skirts of Heydarbaba. When the poet whispers his good memories in the rural area, the reader can understand the strong emotional tie between the poet and the mountain. As a matter of fact, personal experiences of the poet's childhood make the union to the degree that he puts in words his liberty to the readers once he is in the heart of nature. As Christine Wilson avers, "a personal connection to a particular place will inspire love, respect, and caretaking of that place" (12). Shahryar expresses his deep feelings toward Heydarbaba in these lines:

Heydarbaba may the sun warm your back
May your smiles and your springs shed tears,
Your children collect a bunch of flowers
Send it with the coming wind towards us,
Perhaps my sleeping fortune would awaken! (16-20)

In these lines, the mountain is considered as an independent character in the non-human world that has connections with people. Clearly, the poet's tone becomes more emotional, like a mother who warms her child; the same role is played by the mountain, a mother who awakens the "sleeping fortune" and brings blessing to the life of her child. As Axel Goodbody states, "environmental consciousness is necessarily grounded in sense of place and that sustainable behavior can be fostered by reconnecting individuals to place" (56), by valuing the very self of the environmental space, he leads his readers to the conservative behavior toward the non-human world.

4. Conclusion

As long as the new age of technology and development finds man's benefits and ignores the natural rights of the environment in the progression trajectory, ecocriticism questions and criticizes the modern era in disrespecting the non-human rights and bringing ecological crises. The writers recognized the dissatisfaction of the poet with the devastating effects of modernization on the nature and assumed them as one of the ecocritical concerns of the poet. Shahryar's deep attachment to his surrounding environment and his anthropomorphic literary strategies depict an ecocentric sensibility. In fact, the poet with the aid of anthropomorphism advances the opposite perspective, which is ecocentric. Rejecting the instrumental use of nature indicates his deep concern about the future of the environment. Thus, his verses invoke his readers to be aware of their responsibility toward nature and to be respectful to the non-human universe.

Disavowing the tendency to see human being's requirements prior to the environmental rights, Shahryar presents the beauties of the landscape in an artistic manner to the eyes of the readers. In fact, aestheticism of landscape is a tool to arouse the interests of the readers to the natural elements around them. The poet skillfully describes prominent angles of the non-human universe to the degree that he searches for the interaction between man and nature in the heart of his verses. The Iranian poet implies that the voice of the non-human domain is unheard unless it is reflected in human discourse. This shows the interdependency and interconnectedness of human and the non-human world. He, further, persists to echo the voice of the mountain in a stronger tone than the civilized or civilization-stricken man, representing it as more human and humane than such people. The esthetics of landscape, in fact, gives sacredness to the given place, which is in sharp contrast to its devastation by others.

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