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Blurring Boundaries and Relocating Ethics: An Eco-critical Study of Australian Landscape through the Lens of Murray Bail's *Eucalyptus* and James Woodford's *The Wollemi Pine*

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Abstract: This paper proposes to map how an ecological understanding of Australian landscape can be split across two distinct registers. First, by borrowing but also nuancing Lawrence Buell's thesis of environment which is present, "…not merely as a framing device but begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history", it will attempt to read Murray Bail's *Eucalyptus* as a case-study of understanding the environment as a process rather than a constant or a given entity. It would use ecofeminism and generic aspects of the novel to foreground an environmental aesthetics that not only undercuts anthropocentrism but also transcends the boundaries of a nation-state to construct an alternative model of ecology. Secondly I will use James Woodford's *The Wollemi Pine* to interrogate issues concerning eco-semiotics, dwelling and autopoesis. The central thesis of this paper would be to investigate whether there can be a bridge between rational Cartesian framework of Botanical science and a loving perception towards nature in order to arrive at an understanding of ecology that takes into account ethical imperatives. Thus my paper interrogates how these two registers remain contingent upon and mitigate through each other and how the Australian landscape served to facilitate their coming together.

Keywords: ecofeminism, semiotics, ethics, ecology, dwelling, autopoesis, anthropocentrism, nation

Introduction

The continent of Australia, with its uncanny landscape and unconventional flora and fauna has always posed a serious challenge to that brand of British Romanticism that upholds an idealized and pastoral view of nature. It is this "strangeness" that has distinguished Australia landscape from the other continents, especially Europe. However, it is this strangeness that has contributed in a significant way in defining Australia's identity as a nation. In this context Paul Carter notes in his essay "Naming Place": "In so far as its nature is undifferentiated, it does not have a distinct character. Lacking this, it cannot be compared and so known…Not amenable to the logic of association, Australia appears to be unknowable" (403). It is this element of unknowability and the ways in which it is negotiated that forms the crux of the novels that are taken up for further discussion. The paper is divided into two sections. In the first section, Murray Bail's *Eucalyptus* is analysed to discuss issues concerning representation of landscape that are at once specific to Australia and yet universal, simultaneously attempting an ecofeminist reading of the text. While in the second section, James Woodford's The *Wollemi Pine* is investigated as a specific case-study of non-fiction nature-writing that interrogates issues of semiotics, dwelling and autopoesis. The reason for choosing these two distinct texts – one fiction and the other non-fiction – is to depict that inspite of generic differences, certain concerns about Australian landscape are central in the image making of a nation. There is a constant interplay between a loving perception towards nature and a rational Cartesian framework of botanical science and this study would seek to understand whether there can be a bridge between these two diametrically polar entities to arrive at a perception about ecology that takes into account ethical considerations.

Landscape and Story-telling

This section uses Murray Bail's book *Eucalyptus* as a case-study to illustrate nature as a space of ambivalence and contradictions, where nature is not only a physical-material entity but also a cultural

construction. However, as Christia Grewe-Volpp (2006) notes the paradox inherent in such a construction,

> …such representations [nature as something out there'] can only be efforts to approach non-human reality with human means: perception, reflection, imagination, articulation. Knowing they cannot really know the extratextual on its own terms , authors will have to develop respect for that which exists "out there" and try to portray it in its difference and as Carolyn Merchant puts it-as "a free autonomous actor. (78)

What also needs to be noted is that, even when one represents nature as an active dynamic force, this kind of representation too stems from a socio-cultural construction of nature. Therefore, it undercuts the concepts of human dominance and separateness, and instead focuses on their inextricability and inter-dependence. In this section, I would demonstrate how this understanding of nature takes place from human perspective. I would argue that in Murray Bail's *Eucalyptus*, this understanding is necessarily two-fold: one, which tries to make sense of it from a botanical and scientific perspective, and the other considers nature as a free-floating signifier that often has surprises in store for us. Examples are provided as evidence to substantiate how this botanical and scientific perspective is operative in the book. First, it can be understood from the fact that each of the thirty-nine chapters of the book is named after a eucalyptus and its scientific name, *Obliqua*, *Barberi*, *Eximia,* etc. Secondly, this is also understood in its third-person narrative style that describes the way in which Holland took care of the trees.

> Holland planted a Yellow Bloodwood *(E. eximia*)
>
> Here we have a tree so sensitive to frosts it sticks closer to the coast, within cooee of Sidney. With peculiar stubbornness he planted others and nursed the last remaining plant, a weedy looking thing. Every day he forked the earth, and gave it a drink

> from a cup, distributed bits of sheep manure, and at night threw up an anti-frost barricade of tin and Hessian. It grew and thrived. There it stands now.
>
> Unusual for a eucalypt the Yellow Bloodwood has a shivering canopy of leaves almost touching the ground, like an errant oak. "The botanical journals have this to say: 'the specific name is taken from the English adjective eximious, in the sense that the tree in flower is extraordinary." (Bell 1998, 16-17)

There are two things worth taking notice in the above passage. First, its scientific precision and secondly its focus on the indigenous knowledge of using sheep manure that helped the tree to survive. Thus, the emphasis is on the creation of a commons where the collaborative efforts of the "layman" and the scholarly community can be effective in arriving at a more holistic understanding of ecological knowledge that combine both specialised and non-specialised understandings/interruptions of knowledge. The word "layman" for Holland is deliberate. This is because Holland does not have any formal, technical or scientific training about trees. His knowledge is accumulated over the years and often "from the most unlikely sources." However, the skill that he definitely possessed was that he could sift the useful information from amidst a range of not so useful ones.

> Often while talking on the street Holland put out a scrap of paper and made a note; for example the address of an obscure roadside nursery in the Northern Territory run by the second cousin of somebody's step-sister, a Latvian, who has known Australian parrot in cages, and who had perfected the art of painting desert scenes of photographic precision on emu eggs. That was where Holland acquired the island-loving *E.nesophilia*, which has the urn-shaped fruit, and the Rough-leaved Range

> Gum (*E.aspera*), very rare, difficult to grow. (Bell 1998, 43)

Later he does boast of the fact the he does not require specialized experts any more, and it is they who contact him, as if he had all the answers. The juxtaposition of these two modes of knowledge is an instrumental mechanism for an ideal conservation policy that is more inclusive and resists exclusionary politics. It is imperative to point out why I consider nature depicted in the book as a free-floating signifier. This is because the "story-teller" or the person whom Ellen ultimately chooses as his partner takes up names of various Eucalyptus trees and yarns stories around them and sometimes the stories do not have any relation to the original name whatsoever and even if they do, the imaginative often transmutes the scientific. For instance, he takes the name of Hooked Mallee (*E. desertorum*) and then weaves a story about how a barren woman had once travelled through a desert and was finally able to get a child who ultimately died or he takes the common name "Messmate" of a eucalyptus named *E.exscerta* and constructs a story about two soldiers who were friends and how one of them wrote letters to his friend's beloved, while he got injured during a war. It is noteworthy that Ellen despised the names of Eucalyptus and was even disgusted at the mention of them but when it came to stories around them, she seemed to get immersed in them.

> As Ellen entered the stories, or his sketches for stories, she saw how they grew from the names of the eucalyptus, usually the less fancy common names. And if many of the stories were based on the flimsiest foundations or even a complete misreading of a name, it hardly mattered. (146)

This study would argue that this encapsulates Arnold Berleant's aesthetics of environment, which is based on the premise that 'person and environment are continuous', wherein there is no definite way to distinguish one from the other, rather it results in an aesthetic response which is always already a material engagement than a contemplative one: "If every thing has an aesthetic dimension, then so does experience of every thing … an aesthetic dimension is inherent in all

experience"(quoted in Head 238). This aesthetics of environment is particularly useful because it undercuts the duality between ecocentrism and anthropocentrism and thus leads to the formation of an alternative rhetoric of ecology which is more organic and aesthetic.

Textuality, Green materialism and Ecofeminism

Construction of an alternative model of ecology would necessarily entail engagement with issues concerning textuality and generic concerns. This is because the ethos of ecological aestheticism is manifested in the way this novel is written which is not only self-reflexive about its own creation but also perpetuates a kind of organic growth. Keeping this is mind, it is necessary to consider these two passages:

> After going through the available anthographies Holland selected eucalyptus for density of foliage, each Idiffe rent but set to reach the same height. (42)

> After the windbreak, the 'rubber plantation' and the ornamental avenue, Holland turned his back on mass formations. From now on he concentrated on individual species, planted singly. Otherwise there was no plan behind his programme. Gradually he filled in the landscape. He slept for long periods. Days and weeks of inactivity were spent in bed, followed by intense activity. All along he avoided planting duplicates; and soon he ran into problems of supply. The more successful his programme, the more difficult it became to continue.
>
> Many years were spent culling, reducing most species to a single healthy specimen. (42-43)

What is noteworthy in the above passages is a human being's contribution in the formation of a landscape. Dominic Head argues in this context:

> …the represented landscape becomes a text in which human interaction with the environment is indelibly recorded : it follows that a Green Materialist reading of this inner text cannot divorce the social from the natural, or, indeed the question of form from content…The simple point is that a textualizing process for the novel belongs to the creative as much as the critical sphere , and that, far from producing alienation, it may indicate the necessary route to an invigorated Green materialism. (236 and 237)

There are two things that emerge from this section. First "inner text cannot divorce the social from the natural", which I would illustrate through an ecofeminist reading of the text, thereby intersecting the dual politics of Green Materialism and Ecofeminism. Secondly, how does a novel awareness about its own textuality lead to an "invigorated Green materialism"? The answer lies in the fact that the author constantly draws a parallel between stories that are old and constantly go through a process of revisions, adaptations and modifications, while in essence remaining the same and "families or forests reproduce ever-changing appearance of themselves; the geology of fable" (24 and 25). This awareness is also highlighted when the narrator refers to how the Ghost Gum has been identified as one belonging to the Corymbia family, and thereby renamed as *Corymbia aparranjia*, while it was initially thought to be belonging to the family of eucalyptus.

> It is this chaotic diversity that has attracted men to the world of eucalypts. For here was a maze of tentative half-words and part-descriptions, constantly expanding and contracting, almost out of control-a world within the world, but too loosely contained. It cried out for a 'system' of

> some kind, where order could be imposed on a region of nature's unruly endlessness. (35)

The obvious implication is its constant inter-relationship with language which is as contingent and arbitrary as nature. No matter how much one strives to systematize an entity like nature, using language as a medium, it remains elusive because meaning is forever deferred due to slippage of language. Hence, following the paradigms set by Lawrence Buell, it is argued that this is a kind of Green materialism where "the nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history" (quoted in Head 237).

The book has a mythical, fairy-tale kind of a setting wherein the father Holland has come up with a peculiar idea to choose a husband for his daughter, Ellen. Holland's garden or territory is home to several thousand varieties of Eucalyptus, which he has collected and nurtured over time. The contest that he has laid out for his daughter's suitors is that whoever is successfully able to name and identify all the varieties of Eucalyptus wins his daughter's hand. Several suitors try their luck and remain unsuccessful in their venture. Therefore, Ellen virtually had no agency or choice of her own in selecting the person that she would marry. Hence, it is imperative to locate Ellen's position within the paradigms offered by ecofeminism. The term ecofeminism was coined by the French feminist Francoise d'Eaubonne in her 1974 essay "The Time for Ecofeminism." Since there is no single strand of eco-feminist thought, it is necessary to engage in and examine the multiple strands of such a thought before attempting Ellen's positionality. On one hand, quotes Janis Birkeland, "women have historically been seen as closer to earth or nature" (18) and this has given birth to "a complex morality based on dominance and exploitation" (19) in which the two linked forces of exploitation are powerfully and mutually reinforcing. As opposed to this understanding of ecofeminism that equates women with nature, thereby foregrounding a sense of inferiority, a form of ecofeminism named "biological essentialism takes shape in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The primary postulate of this school of ecofeminist thought is that this equivalent ranking of women with

nature is not one of inferiority but it creates a space for women empowerment and heightened responsibility for tendering about nature. This is because women are traditionally believed to be closer to nature because of their biological proximity to nature. In this context, Peter Hay notes:

> This biological "closeness" was said to stem from women's physiology; from the menstrual cycle, the acts of carrying and giving birth to young life and from nurturing and nursing-all processes said to make for a privileged oneness with Mother Earth and innate attunement to the rhythms of other natural processes. (76)

However one needs to take into account and be alive to the demerits of such a stance. It would be greatly reductive and generalized, if one perceives women to be closer to nature than men, simply because of their biological closeness. Victoria Davion thus makes a distinction between "ecofeminist" and "ecofeminine" positions, wherein the "ecofeminist" position stresses on the fluidity of the concept of gender and its continuous attempt to re-define the category of gender while "ecofeminism" is largely based on inversion of traditional gender categories. In this context, Christina Cuomo observes:

> Many human females have been conceived, and have conceived of themselves, as dominators within the logic of domination-as above nature, and/or as above other members of the human species. Women, especially members of industrial and technological societies have contributed to the oppression of the nonhuman world, and must admit to this complicity so that they can create alternatives. (quoted in Hay 78)

Therefore, ecofeminism fundamentally emphasizes on recognition of further categories based on gender, class, race and ethnicity. What one needs to be constantly aware of is that the "logic of domination" is linked to power-relations in society and how those wielding the power

(which is not always necessarily male) uses the power for their own benefit and use.

Having discussed the plural and rather heterogeneous strands of ecofeminist thought, I would argue that there is almost something transformative inherent within such a thought. The question is the nature of this kind of a transformation. Borrowing from Karen Warren, it may be stated that this kind of a transformation needs to be located in the paradigmatic shift from arrogance to love, that results in the articulation of an "ethic of care" which is relational.

> An ecofeminist perspective about women and nature involves this shift in attitude from 'arrogant perception' to 'loving perception' of the non-human world … Any environmental movement or ethic based on arrogant perceptions builds a moral hierarchy of beings. In contrast, 'loving perception' presupposes and maintains difference – a distinction between the self and the other, between humans and at least some nonhumans-in such a way that perception of the other as other is an expression of love for one who/which is recognized at the outset as independent, different. (quoted in Hay 85)

The relevance of "ethic of care" is something that would be dealt with later in the paper. However, where do we locate Ellen in such a framework of ecofeminist thought? In the novel, there is a constant association being made between Ellen and nature to depict their closeness. For instance, she is portrayed as a virgin but it is her "specked beauty" that is believed to attract men towards her:

> …She was so covered in small brown-black males that she attracted men, every sort of men. These few too many birthmarks of the first-born tipped the balance on her face and throat: men felt free to wander with their eyes all over, across the pale spaces and back again to the factual dots, the way

> a full stop brings to a halt a meandering sentence. And she allowed it, her face was unresisting; she did not seem to notice them. So the men felt unstoppable, going from one point to the next, even under her chin and back to the one touching her top lip, and it was as if they were running with their eyes over every part of her nakedness. (32)

Immediately after this description of Ellen's beauty, one finds a description of eucalyptus and an analysis of its etymology, wherein the word is derived from Greek and means "well" and "covered", and thereafter the narrator describes:

> …Until they open, ready for fertilization, the eucalypt's buds are covered by an operculum, in effect putting a lid on the reproductive organs.
>
> It is all very prudish. At the same time-and here we find paradox is a leading characteristic of the eucalypt-the surrounding leaves are almost promiscuous in their flaunting of different shapes, colours and shine: 'fixed irregularity' is botany's way of putting it. One or two species even sport variegated leaves. (34)

Thus, the obvious parallel between Ellen's beauty spots and the leaves of the eucalyptus and the paradox serves to underline their mutual connections. In fact, the biological closeness that is discussed above is also highlighted when Ellen tests whether she is menstruating or not in the midst of nature:

> She did it the day she first menstruated; a celebration of growth and confusion. The pale red of her fingerprints she tested on a trunk was the only primary colour in the grove. (41)

However I would argue that this closeness to nature does not lead to any emancipation or liberation for Ellen who still has no choice in the

selection of her own husband. Under such circumstances, how does one read Ellen's decision to over-ride the choice of her father and instead her "choice" to marry the "story-teller"? This can be interpreted in two ways. First, Ellen's choice can be understood in the context of "ethic of care", wherein the "story-teller" had appealed to her sense of "loving perception" of nature by articulating stories around the names of eucalyptus that were fundamentally about fathers and daughters, unusual courtship (for instance: the story of the love-affair between a girl and her hair-dresser), etc. Therefore, there was a greater sense of compassion and empathy embedded in his manner of dealing with her. On the other hand, Mr. Cave's attitude towards nature and the fact that he had enviable knowledge about it gave birth to a sense of pride which is reflected in his arrogant perception about nature. This is illustrated when Mr. Cave often did not pay attention to the common varieties of Eucalyptus, only to be reminded by Holland about the rule that he needs to identify each and every variety to win his daughter's hand. Ellen's choice signifies this shift from an "arrogant perception" to a "loving perception" of nature, which forms the crux of "ethic of care". Secondly, Ellen's "choice" does not signal an escape from patriarchy or any kind of resistance towards it. This is because she is enchanted and caught in a web of words of the "story-teller" and falls terribly sick when he does not turn up for a few days. In fact, the only thing that can provide her some sort of comfort and solace are his stories. It is noteworthy that Ellen technically does not have much dialogue in the plotline and is only a passive listener and not an active creator of meaning. Besides, the way in which Ellen is rescued at the end typically echoes the fairy-tale ethos wherein the damsel-in-distress is rescued by the prince charming. Therefore, what essentially happens for Ellen is a kind of shift from one kind of patriarchal framework to another. Hence it is my contention that although ecofeminism does address certain patriarchal questions and aspects, it also leads to the creation of a new set of problems which we need to be sensitive about. However its success lies in the fact that it opens up a discursive space for initiation of dialogue between ecology, gender and institution. Here I would also add that this dialogue about ecofeminism can become or at least claim to become more inclusive, only after it takes into account indigenous models of ecofeminism because Euro-centric or ecofeminist thought

propagated by the first-world academy often ends up in making sweeping generalizations and therefore it is limited in some ways to address specific issues that emerge due to an intersection between indigenous lifestyle and feminism.

Eucalyptus and National Landscape

Much like gender discourses, flora and fauna has been an effective instrument through which ideas about nation and nationalism has been propagated since the creation of a nation-state. Under such circumstances, it becomes imperative to discuss the link that exists (or does not exist) between nationalism and landscape as exemplified in the novel *Eucalyptus*. The questions include: Is there anything called a "national landscape"? If yes, how is such a landscape constructed? What implications does it have for a postcolonial nation-state? Consider the following passage:

> At the same time(be assured), strenuous efforts will be made to avoid the rusty-traps set by ideas of a National Landscape, which is of course an interior landscape, fitted out with blue sky and the obligatory tremendous gum tree, perhaps some merinos chewing on the bleached-out grass in the foreground, the kind of landscape seen during home-sickness and in full colour on suburban butchers' calendars hanged out with sausages at Christmas…Every country has its own landscape which deposits itself in layers on the consciousness of its citizens, thereby canceling the exclusive claims made by all other national landscapes. Furthermore, so many eucalypts have been exported to different countries in the world, where they have grown into sturdy see-through trees and infected the purity of these landscapes. Summer views of Italy, Portugal, Northern India, California, to take obvious examples, can appear at first glance as classic Australian landscapes–until

> the eucalypts begin to look slightly out of place,
> like Giraffes in Scotland or Tasmania. (23)

The narrator seems to be vehemently opposing the idea of a "national landscape" and makes an effort to convince the readers that this idea would not be promoted by him in any manner, as reflected in his parenthetical remark, "be assured." This is because although a conception of this kind is intended to encourage feelings of oneness and feelings of nationalism, it ends up being largely universalistic and often does not take into consideration individual discourses and also perspectives of indigenous communities. This process of visual image-making of a nation, as reflected in national calendars is a kind of Althusserian ideological state apparatus, where the postcolonial nation-state perpetuates a particular kind of ideology (for instance, the idea of a national landscape) to maintain its hegemony and dominance. This kind of an interpellation of the subject is useful for the state because then it can safely engage in playing a politics of exclusion. Murray Bail avoids the pitfalls of such a construction of landscape by taking the symbol of a eucalyptus, a tree which has been greatly used in promotion of a national landscape but subverts any kind of homogeneity, by bringing into play the individual discourses of Holland, Mr. Cave, Ellen and the story-teller. Each of these discourses are distinct and often are in conflict with each other , but nevertheless they co-exist in the narrative, thereby giving birth to a utopian vision-a vision that forms the basis for a postcolonialism, which is aspirational in the context of Australia. Hence eucalyptus ceases to be an emblem of national integration and instead becomes a powerful symbol to avoid ecological determinism.

A central dialectic that has emerged out of my discussion of the novel Eucalyptus is a constant tension that is operative between the scientific, rational world of Holland and Mr. Cave and an imaginative world of the story-teller. Although it may appear that this imaginative world which promises to be affectionate towards nature wins over the scientific framework, what cannot be denied is that the story-teller's action lacks ethicality, in a conventional way. This is because his objective from the very beginning has been to win Ellen's hand, which he never discloses to Ellen during his period of story-telling. In fact,

one of the chief reasons why Ellen gets attracted to him is because he does not seem to be concerned about issues of marriage and courtship. It is this apparent lack of indifference which seems to draw Ellen towards him and therefore this pretension of indifference on the part of the story-teller is deceptive in some ways and bereft of ethics. Hence while the logical framework of the novel lacks in compassion, the imaginative world is marked by an absence of ethical imperative. It is from this vantage point of the need for a bridge between ethics, science and a loving perception of nature that I would begin my discussion of James Woodford's *The Wollemi Pine.*

Ecosemiotics and *The Wollemi Pine*

James Woodford's *The Wollemi Pine* (2000) chronicles the discovery of a living fossil called the Wollemia that has been in existence since the times of the dinosaurs and has unexpectedly survived both weather conditions and Aboriginal stick-farming. The book belongs to the genre of non-fictional nature writing, written in a first-person narrative style and combines newspaper reports, personal interviews and the author's own experience at the canyon, where the Wollemi pines are located. In this section, my purpose is to understand the communication processes in nature with that of human beings from an ecosemiotic point of view. In this context, Timo Maran notes:

> In nature literature, an author combines his/her immediate perceptual and bodily experience of specific natural surroundings with cultural knowledge –e.g. scientific data, traditional wisdom or environmental philosophy. Furthermore, readers, who have their own immediate, experience of nature, interpret nature essays in relation to their own personal cognition. Thus, from the ecosemiotic point of view, it does not seem appropriate to regard nature-writing as a unitary object of study, but rather as being connected to another text, which is hidden in the rhythms, patterns and structures of nature and is also read from there. (472)

Therefore *Wollemi Pine* needs to be analysed in the broader scope of an intricate complex network of texts that interact not only at levels of immediate perception, which may be spontaneous but are also informed by cultural discourses of science and ecology. However, before engaging with the text, it is imperative to define ecosemiotics and discuss briefly its various principles. According to Kalevi Kull:

> Ecosemiotics can be defined as the semiotics of relationships between nature and culture. This includes research on the semiotic aspects of the place and role of nature for humans, i.e. what is and what has been the meaning of nature for us, humans and in what extent we communicate with nature. Ecosemiotics deals with the semiosis going on between a human and its ecosystem, or a human in one's ecosystem. (quoted in Hay 462)

Therefore, ecosemiotics seems to be fundamentally bridging the gap between semiotics of nature and semiotics of culture. The question of how the distance between these two poles is bridged by ecosemiotics will form the core of this analysis. Here, it is noteworthy to point out that the semiotic point of view applied to evaluate nature is anthropocentric. According to Timo Maran, this anthropocentrism is manifested in two ways. First, any evaluation of nature is based on logical reasoning. Secondly, human beings perceive themselves to be in a superior moral position to evaluate nature and the decisions do not directly have any effect on the subject (Maran 465). It is these anthropocentric principles which are dismissed by ecocentrism because it foregrounds how "it is in the nature of a sign to bind the object and the subject into an inseparable unit of meaning." Therefore the position of the human subject also undergoes a considerable change and hence it would be a blasphemy to argue that any decision taken by him does not produce any consequence on him.

> Every known relation between a human being as an ethical subject and nature as an object is also a sign/meaning relation. This means that every perception, cognition and representation of the natural world becomes an irreducible part of the

> subjective world of the ethical subject in the very moment it emerges. (Maran 467)

Ecosemiotics is also essential in defining what makes us human because it is by an understanding of the other that we can legitimize and perhaps validate our identity. This self-definition often leads to a kind of fashioning of the human subject and it is also a key to understand that this bi-directional mode of communication is not always done by human beings alone but often it is the other way round.

> We live together and in relation with other semiotic objects. By being able to create meaningfully organized subjective worlds of their own which may be rather different from ours, they hold the positions to address us, to question us and to enter into dialogic relations with us. These relations are essential for making us human. (Maran 470)

Having discussed the key postulates of such a theory, it is now worthwhile to engage with the text itself. At the very outset of the book, Woodford describes David Noble's dexterity as a nature-walker whose interaction with nature is not aimed at gaining dominance over the landscape but rather the objective is to seamlessly merge with the landscape such that one is able to understand the recurring patterns in it.

> To travel as Noble does through the Wollemi wilderness is a form of genius. It is not to learn by rote every nook and cranny or to plan an expedition as if the forest could be conquered, but a matter of sensing the patterns in the landscape so that every route, even if it has never been travelled, can become predictable. (12)

Therefore the focus is always on strengthening our sense of perception, so that it is possible to establish a dialogue with nature. In other words, it is by virtue of the nature in us that we can know nature. In this context, David Abram notes:

> Our bodies have formed themselves in delicate reciprocity with the manifold textures, sounds, and shapes of an animate earth-our eyes have evolved in the subtle interactions with other eyes, as our ears are attuned by their very structure to the howling of wolves and honking of geese. To shut ourselves from these other voices, to continue by our lifestyle to condemn these other sensibilities to the oblivion of extinction, is to rob or senses of their integrity, and to rob our own minds of their coherence. We are humans only in contact, and conviviality with what is not human. (quoted in Maran 471)

It is during one of these explorations that he chanced upon a leaf litter which in his own words looked "a bit different" (14) and therefore he took the decision to collect it as a souvenir and later showed it to Wyn Jones, a naturalist with twenty-five years experience in identifying plants. Once Jones and Noble went back to the same spot, Woodford writes:

> When Jones entered the grove he saw leaves in the creek and looked up, 'I saw it straight away', he said. 'My head was in that bloody canopy and there it was. It was quite different from all the other rainforest trees around it: its shape and the type of destiny of the foliage and the patterning of the branches. I took a photograph straight away of that particular tree'…Jones used both his video and stills cameras and began stuffing a few branches into his backpack. 'I knew I needed more sexually active material', he said. He gathered more of the lower leaves-green ones this time-and pollen cones. 'We got bubbly bark. That was critical. The bubbly bark was probably the single most stunning feature of it'. (20)

Therefore as stated earlier while discussing the theoretical positions on ecosemiotics, the semiotics of both nature and culture (video, still camera, etc) are used simultaneously to arrive at an ecological conclusion and also reducing the gap between the semiotics of nature and semiotics of culture. This is further exemplified in the book when complex processes of palaeobotany and germinology are referred to. In this case, it is the human subject that mediates between these two forms of semiotics and initiates a kind of reciprocity and mutual exchange. Here it would be worthwhile to point out that the reference to intensive scientific rigour and methodology may alienate a reader but at the same time it also offers a space to the reader to engage with the text from his own discourse that may or may not take into account the scientific view-point. Does that affect the reader's understanding of the subject in any way? The reader, by bringing his own experiences at play, actively participates in the meaning-making procedure which gives birth to a new set of interpretations and hence the scientific perspective is only one of them and never forms the core. The sign and the subject are intertwined with each other, any decision about the sign, in this case the wollemi pine, is bound to have impact on the subject. This is illustrated in the nomenclature process of the Wollemi Pine.

> Naming the tree however turned into a bitter dispute between Allen and Jones on the one hand and Ken Hill, on the other. Hill, who did play a crucial role in giving a scientific rigour to the taxonomic description of the new genus, was frustrated that he had been excluded from the early identification process… A tense vote was held between Allen, Jones and Hill. Allen voted for noblei, determined to see Dave Noble honoured. Jones voted with Hill as part of a deal ensuring that Jan Allen would be allowed to be a joint author of the scientific paper announcing the discovery of the tree to the academic world. Thus the new genus became Wollemia nobilis by two votes to one. (45)

This passage invokes an ethos of detective fiction with its undercover dealings, sheer excitement and psychological action. Therefore, an act of nomenclature entailed a lot of negotiations, agreements and secrecy that would chart the future of those involved in it.

Autopoesis and Dwelling

One of the chief objectives of this paper has been to examine the necessity of a link between a scientific perception and an ethical, affectionate view of nature. This is the contention of the study that the concept of autopoesis and Heidegger's notion of dwelling are effective in bridging this gap and the book *The Wollemi Pine* encapsulates the same. In the context of autopoesis, W. Fox writes, "The concept of autopoesis refers to the fact that the essential feature of living systems is that they continuously strive to produce and sustain their own organizational activity and structure" (quoted in Hay 34). It is this capacity for growth or regeneration that constitutes an entity as an end in itself rather than as an instrumental constituent of extrinsic ends. Besides the autopoetic grounding of intrinsic value brings about a paradigmatic shift from individual components to all spheres of biological life (Hay 34). This is reflected when Woodford describes his own experience of visiting the Wollemi Pine:

> The strangest thing about the pines was that they actually looked primitive, as if they lacked all the fancy accessories that trees have evolved in the last 100 million years. They looked like ferns on steroids. One thing they did boast though, was individuality-as Offord had said, Wollemia is noted for its plasticity and it was clear that to survive down there, a tree needed to be able to make abrupt changes in direction to take advantages of the light. Wollemi pines may not have any genetic variability but in appearance I had never encountered a more varied lot. Fat ones, skinny ones, bent-over ones, other growing out of the remains of dead predecessors and fig-like ones

> all surrounded me, Some were living on tiny 'floodplains', others on sandy ledges and others still out of cracks in the sandstone. (188)

The emphasis is on the point that ecological balance is also tied to issues of adaptability and sustenance which are crucial components to formulation of an ecocentric philosophy and ethics. It is this issue of sustenance that brings me to the next notion of "dwelling" conceptualized by Heidegger which states that to dwell authentically is to dwell in place. According to him, the tragic consequence of modernity is that not only we are rendered homeless but we do not even seem to be aware of the fact that we are homeless (Hay 160). The idea of home is essentially tied to the concept of place, where place is an embodiment of multiple signifiers notably land and environment. In Sikorski's words, "To dwell, in its most profound sense, is to preserve things in their place, to spare them actively from anything that might disturb them, make them different from what they are" (quoted in Hay 160). This requires a stewardship of the place on the part of the dwellers and has been a dominant strand of Aboriginal world-view and literature. This stewardship requires a kind of commitment on our part as individuals who would care of places, perhaps by building or cultivation but not subordinate it to human will. It is only through such a process that the idea of "home" can be realized. This is what it means to "dwell", which is for Heidegger, "the essence of human existence" (Hay 160). The idea of dwelling and the constant tension to actualize this idea of home through various safety-measures runs throughout the book. First the author mentions about how Wollemi pine seeds are germinated in nurseries around the world and thereby indicates the success of artificial cultivation and scientific endeavours. Secondly while describing his own visit to the canyon he mentions how they were blindfolded, the various precautions taken by him and the agreement that they had to sign:

> We were to promise absolute confidentiality about the Wollemi pines. 'The applicant agrees to use the phrase "in a canyon in the Wollemi National Park" when referring to the location of the site,' the

> consent form insisted. Rick and I had been told to ensure that everything we were wearing was newly washed, that no seeds were struck in our shoes and that was left in the cuffs or pockets of our clothes. We signed the forms. (175)

However the irony lies in the fact that while the government was actively involved in their conservation policy and adopting suitable measures to prevent any harm and damage to the trees, there was a section which was so aggressively involved in witnessing the Wollemi Pine in their natural surroundings that they did not pay any heed to precautions. This is illustrated in the following example: "As John Benson has warned constantly since the discovery of Wollemia, the greatest threat the species face is from humans. The trees are only a few spores away from extinction due to plant pathogen imported on the soles of hikers' boots"(198). Hence it is indeed the tragedy of modern civilization that we have perhaps failed in realizing our own good. *The Wollemi Pine* is one such book that speaks about the need to retain our sense of being and it is only possible through our actualization of the environment as home.

To conclude, the Australian landscape is not to be understood merely as a passive and neutral recipient of socio-cultural dynamics. Rather their interaction with the human sphere needs to be located in a wider context of several layers of transactions and exchanges that characterize this space between the human and non-human world. It has attempted to articulate the heterogeneous and polyvalent discourses surrounding environment and ethics. Therefore, the objective in this paper has been to portray the Australian landscape not only as a topographical entity but also as a model for alternative understanding of land and what it means to belong to that land by-passing any kind of essentialist stance. In the contemporary society when technological determinism seems to be in a kind of conflict with environmental conservation, there is a need to enunciate a dialogue between them. In fact, favouring one over the other has the potential to spell doom for mankind and therefore it is important to promote a synthesis. My paper has tried to demonstrate how these two registers remain contingent

upon and mitigate through each other and how the Australian landscape served to facilitate their coming together.

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