

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.53032/tcl.2017.2.5.48>

The Interminable War of Men against Nature: An Ecological View on Sidney Sheldon's *The Best Laid Plans*

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Abstract

War is the major threaten of human beings against nature and its resources. In this scientific and technological era, wars are more than a natural calamity which could swipe millions of beings and their chief dependent, nature in seconds. Countries all over the world negotiate and create peace treaties; on the other hand they do research in nuclear weapon which is disastrous. Now-a-days a countries power is determined only by the weapons that they posses. The worse impact of war, its exploitation and total destruction of nature and its resources are described very effectively and empathetically in Sidney Sheldon's *The Best Laid Plans*. The novel pictures the traumatic effect of war on human beings and nature as a whole in Sarajevo. In this mode the paper deals with the study of the novel in relation to ecocriticism, the application of ecological concepts to the study of literature.

Introduction to Ecocriticism

Keywords- *Suppression, Ecocriticism, Technology, Humanity, Agriculture*

Introduction

Ecocriticism is the study of literature and environment from an interdisciplinary point of view where all sciences pool together to analyze the brainstorm conceivable solution for the alteration of the contemporary environmental situation. Ecocriticism was officially heralded by the publication of two seminal works published in the mid 1990s, *The Ecocriticism Reader*, edited by Cheryl Glotfelly and Harold, and *Environmental Imagination* by Lawrence Buell. Steven Marx reviews as

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Ecocriticism emphasizes a connection between canonized texts, teaching methods and the obligations of citizenship in a world where "Ecocide is more of a threat than nuclear war." ...The political significance of ecocriticism stems from the fact that, "We live our lives by metaphors that have become deceptively transparent...for instance 'progress..' and that "Aesthetics can become a decisive force for or against environmental change."(4)

Ecocriticism is also known as ecopoetics, green studies and environmental literary criticism that investigate the underlying ecological values and observe human perception of wilderness and how it has transformed throughout history. It highlights whether current environmental issues are accurately signified or at least mentioned in current culture and modern literature.

William Rueckert was the first person to use the term ecocriticism. In 1978, Rueckert published an essay titled *Literature and Ecology; an experiment in Ecocriticism*. He focused on "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature" {Reprinted on the *Ecocriticism Reader* on (P.107)}. Meanwhile ecologically minded individuals and scholars published progressive works of ecotheory and criticism which were concerned on the grounds of moral struggle rather than mere biological survival.

Ecocriticism failed to emerge into a coherent movement in the late 1970s and indeed it happened in the USA only during the 1990s. In the mid 1980s, scholars began to work together to establish ecocriticism as a genre, primarily through the works of Western Literary Association in which nature writing was reevaluated. In 1990, at the University of Nevada, Reno, Glotfelty became the first person to hold an academic position as a professor of Literature and the Environment which served as the intellectual home of Ecocriticism. In the USA, Ecocriticism is associated with the Study of Literature and Environment, an organization with thousands of members in the US alone. From the late 1990s, new branches of ASLE and affiliated organizations were started in the UK, Japan, Korea, Australia, New Zealand, India (OSLE), Canada and Europe. In the words of Camilo Gomides ecocriticism is defined as the field of enquiry that analyses and promotes works of art which raise moral questions about human interactions with nature while also motivating audience to live within a limit that will be binding over generations'.

Sidney Sheldon's *The Best Laid Plans*

Sidney Sheldon was an Academy Award winning American writer. He has written bestselling novels such as *Master of the Game* [1982], *The Other Side of Midnight* [1973], and *Rage of Angels* [1980]. He is the seventh best-selling writer of all time. *The Best Laid Plans* is a 1997 novel by Sidney Sheldon. The story is about two equally determined and ambitious persons. Oliver Russell wishes to gain power by becoming President of the United States 'the biggest target in the world' (158) whereas Leslie Stewart wants revenge on Oliver, 'to make him wish he'd never been born' (30). Each step that they take is ultimately towards

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their motive. Their schemes go astray in a deadly dangerous way. Though Oliver is powerful in politics and Leslie in media, they come across strategies which are painful, insulting and intolerable.

Dana Evans is an inquisitive foreign correspondent, who unknots the dangerous plot. She always wished to be a world traveler. She was young, attractive and intelligent. Her belief was 'if something can stop you, you might as well let it' (103). She wished to explore the world and report history, informing the world about the important events that were happening around the world. Before entering Sarajevo, she was excited about the adventures that lay ahead. But just on her way to the inn from the airport, she was able to realise that she was going to report about a city under siege. There were buildings with shattered fronts, apartments without roofs and stores without windows. Everything at Sarajevo was a matter of life and death. In Bosnia and Herzegovina the Serbs, Croats, Bosnians and Muslims lived for decades together. During the II world war, hundreds of thousands of Serbs, who were on the side of the Allies, were wiped out by the Croats, who were on the side of Nazis. Later the Serbs revenges in turn. In Sarajevo, more than two hundred thousand shells have fallen where at least ten thousand would have killed and sixty thousand injured. Sheldon narrates that no one can trust anybody and the only left thing is hate. It was stated;

There was no running water or electricity, and more houses were being bombed every hour. The air raid alarm went on so frequently that people ignored it. A miasma of fatalism seemed to hang over the city. If the bullet had your name on it, there was nowhere to hide [156]

The city is slowly disappearing from the face of the earth without any sort of communication facilities, public transportation or any basic facilities. The people in Sarajevo were would collect water from gutters and that too during the time of storm. Things happened here were beyond human tolerance: babies raped and slaughtered, people were killed in groups by setting fire and a well full of human testicles. Dana cared those people and so her viewers too. At Sarajevo she could hear the thundering sounds of gun firing and flashes of light from the shells. In such a terrible atmosphere where people cannot even assure their life, the importance given to the nature becomes trivial. But the impact of war on nature has its own lasting effect and on human beings it continues for generations.

Another incident in the novel which brings forth the exploiting and selfish nature of human beings is revealed when the king Hamad of Ajman privately meets Oliver Russell. The king seeks the help of the President in order to sponsor a peace treaty between the United Arab Emirates and Israel. The proposal was made not out of human interest to put an end to the war, but to end the war which cost millions of dollars and so sell oil all over the world. The king stated:

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I assure you it is not out of love for the Israelis or for the Americans. It is in our own interests. Too many of our sons have been killed in the madness. We want it to end. It is enough. We want to be free to sell all our oil to the world again. We are prepared to go to war if necessary, but we would prefer peace (293)

It becomes obvious that even nature gifts men, we are unsatisfied with it. Men erode nature for his benefit. The impact of the war on environment and human health is disasters. The application of weapons, the destruction of structures and oil fields, and chemical spraying are all examples of the destroying impact of war on the environment.

The ecological disturbances caused by war have been occurring for thousands of years, but the impact of modern day warfare has made wars increasingly severe and dangerous. The effects of war are a widespread and a long term one. The degradation of infrastructure and basic services brought on by war can wreck havocs on the local environment and public health. Water shortage can also lead to in adequate irrigation of crop land. Agricultural production may also be impaired by intensive bombing. There will also be the degradation of the natural and human environment which includes shortage in cooking fuel. This is an instance were war has invariably resulted in environmental destruction. In the modern era, advancements in military technology used by combatants have resulted in increasingly severe environmental impacts. Military machinery and explosives have caused deforestation and habitual destruction. This has resulted in a serious disruption of ecosystem service including erosion control, water quality and food production.

Conclusion

Nature, the omnipresent and omnipotent, is exploited by human beings for their own benefits. Men in this scientific and technological era wish to overpower nature which is all supreme. He takes little care about the consequences of disturbing the nature. It was quiet friendly to him when he was dependent on nature, but the destruction of nature would end in downfall of mankind as a whole. The environmental degradation brought caused by war has to be reformed. Internationally environmental declarations should be framed to denounce warfare environmental destruction for the betterment of human beings, animals and nature. As Joseph Meeker put forth in *The Comedy of Survival* published in 1974 says that environmental crisis is caused mainly by a cultural tradition in the West which separated human culture from nature. He says “making love not war” is superior ecological value. We must love and protect our nature because human being is an integral part of Nature. If Nature is destroyed, human race is also be perished”.

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