

# Literature and the Endangered World: A Comparative Study of Selected Works of Eastern and Western Poets

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**ABSTRACT**— *Ecocriticism is a new field of enquiry and being so there is yet to be a consensus as to its definition. Glotfelty (1996) defines ecocriticism as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment.” As we are aware, debates on the environmental problems faced by mankind is raging on around the world. According to Hong (2008) ecocriticism is a newly-emerging literary theory standing out in the late 20th century. Siddiqui (2012) defines ecocriticism as an interdisciplinary mode of thinking which studies environmental issue and literature. Kerridge (1998) claims ecocriticism seeks to evaluate text and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis. Buell (2001) claims that there are several defining motifs or topoi in toxic discourse; shock of awakened perception, disenchantment from the illusion of a green oasis accompanied or precipitated by totalising images of a world without refuge from toxic penetration and linking environmental reform with social justice against a common enemy of corporate greed. However, he goes on to add that, there is a gamut of possible reactions including outrage, acquiescence, impotence, denial and desperation (Buell, 2001, 36). In this paper, the researchers analysed the link between literature and environment with focus on one genre which is poetry. In addition to analysing the link, the researchers will also do a comparative analysis of selected works of Western and Asian poets. The purpose is to identify the similarities and differences in the approaches adopted by these poets using Buell’s identification of motifs and reactions towards the destruction of nature at the expense of development. Buell’s identification of the various reactions towards the dying environment was adapted to form the framework identified as the DAIDO ecocriticism analysis which was used to analyse the poets’ perceptions, language and treatment of the subject matter through the stylistic analysis.*

**Keywords**— Ecocriticism, stylistics, DAIDO ecocriticism analysis

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Ecocriticism is the youngest of the revisionist movements that have swept the humanities over the past few decades and according to Oppermann (2011, 28), “The first wave of ecocriticism which started in the mid-1990’s showed the importance of developing ethical relationships with the natural world. The term “ecocriticism” itself was coined in 1978 by William Rueckert. According to Meeker (1997), one of the founders of ecocriticism, the development of ecocriticism is related to the inter-disciplinary educational movement: (t)he inter-disciplinary movement that is crawling through universities these days is not an academic fad but a response to the growing need among people everywhere to find a sense of integrity for their own lives and for their understanding of the world around them . Buell (2001, 31) claims that “within literary and rhetorical studies, the impetus to engage environmental issues has mainly come from the ecocritical movement, which has concerned itself especially with creative and critical recuperation of the natural world, although lately it has begun to engage a wide range of text and positions. According to Wallace and Armbruster (2001, 1), ecocriticism is still emerging and will continue to grow and diversify for the foreseeable future and to date, the field has inspired the publication of a successful introductory anthology (The Ecocriticism Reader); The Establishment of a Journal (Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment); and others. They went on to add that “ecocriticism is

not only useful to scholars... but also the potential topics for ecocritical analysis will help ecocriticism grapple with one of its central conceptual challenges—understanding nature and culture as interwoven rather than as separate sides of a dualistic construct”. Ecologically oriented is not a new phenomenon like the literature it analyses. It is a response to urgent issues of the day. It has been pointed out that ecocriticism continuous to grow as a result of the global environmental crisis. Further, ecocriticism aims to show how the work of writers’ concerned about the environment can play some part in solving real and pressing ecological concerns. According to Mazel (2000), it is the analyses of literature as though nature mattered”. Bearing in mind the definition, extend and depth of ecocriticism, the focus of this paper is to show how selected Asian and Western poets perceive and deal with the issues related to man and the endangered world.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Cokinos (cited in ASLE, n.d.) ecocriticism necessarily entails a shift away from approaches that strictly privilege language and the difficulty of referentiality to approaches that reemphasize the real work of words in a world of consequence, joy and despair. According to Totic (2006), it is a separate movement or school of literary criticism. Totic adds that ecocriticism is a semineologism where “eco is short for ecology, which is concern with the relationships between living organisms in their natural environment as well as their relationships with that environment”. He further adds that by analogy, ecocriticism is concerned with the relationship between literature and environment or how man’s relationships with his physical environment are reflected in literature. The domain of ecocriticism is very broad because it is not limited to any literary genre. In his paper, Totic listed the most widely known ecocritics which includes names like Lawrence Buell, Cheryll Glotfelty, Simon C. Estok, Harold Fromm, William Howarth, William Rueckert, Suellen Campbell, Michael P. Branch and Glen A. Love.

Buell (2005) claims that that the marked increase and “sophistication and environmentalism as an issue within literary and cultural studies testifies to the need to correct somehow against the marginalization of environmental issues in most versions of critical theory that dominated literary and cultural studies through the 1980’s”. According to Bennett (2007), ecocriticism can be divided into two components, where criticism is the process of analysing reading practices (cultural and literary text) while ecological focuses these practices on environmental concerns. Edson set forth an interesting idea that “disease binds the human race together as with an unbreakable chain; the man of wealth” is bound to “the man of poverty by the unbreakable change of contagious that quarantines cannot stop for very long” (cited in Buell 2001, 34). Against this model often favoured hitherto of an “ecological holism” to which acts of imagination had the capacity to (re) connect us, toxic discourse holds that belief in the availability of such a holism by such means is chimerical and divertive. Yet, it recognizes both the rhetorical appeal and the benefit to human and planetary welfare of the ideal of a purified physical environment as an end in itself thereby recognizing physical environment’s non-reducibility to ideological artefact or socioeconomic counter (Buell, 2001, 45). “[T]he boundaries of ‘nature’ and of ‘environmental’ discourse now become much more elastic than formerly conceived (Buell, 2001, 46). Toxic discourse may repress, fail to fulfil, or swerve away from itself according to the drag of other discourses with which is cross-pollinated. According to Dixon (1987), ecocriticism has “taught us to view settings not just as metaphors but as physical spaces that inform, shape, and are shaped by cultural production”. He adds that “the setting of a novel is not just a formal technique but an embodiment of nature’s responsiveness” (cited in Bennett, 2007, 197).

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology where a total of four poets were selected using a purposive sampling method. The reason for using a purposive sampling is twofold: first the purpose of this study is to show how Western and Eastern poets deal with the current state of environment which has become a global concern and secondly to identify the similarities and differences in the way this issue is perceived and treated by the respective poets. The countries selected from the Eastern world are United States of America and Canada while the countries selected from the Western world are Malaysia and Singapore. Due to the limitation in terms of length of the paper, the researchers only selected two poems from each of the poets selected. Poets who dealt with nature were chosen. They are Margaret Atwood (Canada), Stanley Kunitz (United States), Cecil Rajendra (Malaysia) and Boey Kim Cheng (Singapore).

**Table 1: Selection of Poems**

Name	Poem 1	Poem 2
Cecil Rajendra	Death of a Rainforest	Death of a Village
Boey Kim Cheng	Report to Wordsworth	The Planners
Margaret Artwood	The City Planners	The Moment
Stanley Kunitz	The War Against the Trees	Snakes of September

The selected poems were then analysed using the stylistic approach to identify the poets perception and treatment of the endangered environment. The stylistic analysis adopted in this study is combined with Buell’s analysis of Ecocriticism. According to Widdowson (1975), stylistics can be defined as an approach to literature which combines both literary criticism and linguistics as its morphological make-up suggest: “the style”, component relation it to the former and the ‘istics’ component to the latter. This approach is both scientific and technical and but it provokes thought and provides a less intuitive , less personal method of analysis, one which would depend instead on the text and a scientific discipline to interpret them in a form of linguistic analysis. According to Carter and Long (1991), stylistics aims to analyse language used in a text to show how meanings are constructed and communicated. Using this approach, the researchers will analyse key elements in the poem comprising of theme, structure, setting, language, figurative expression as well as diction and imagery. This analysis would enable the researchers to identify how the poets perceive and treat the themes that they are addressing. This would lead to the DAIDO analysis incorporating Denial, Acquiescence, Impotence, Desperation and Outrage (DAIDO) as shown in Figure 1.

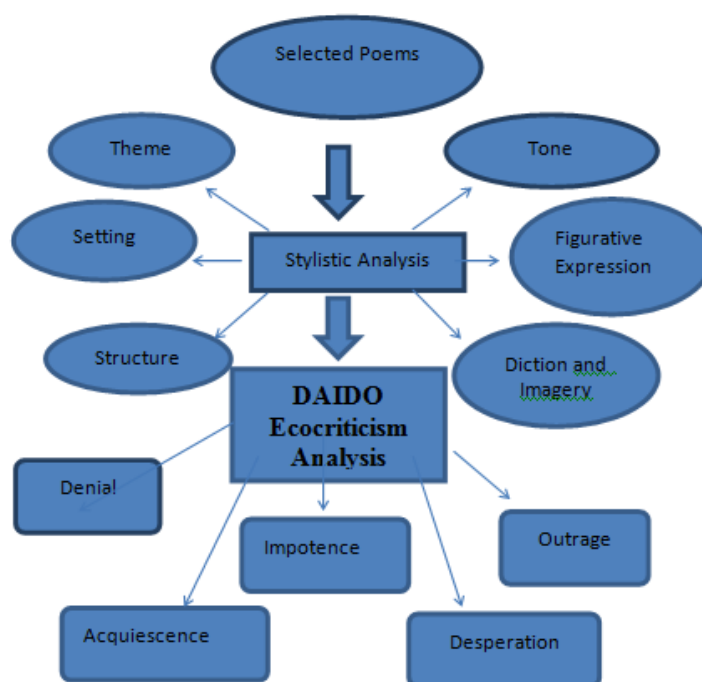


Figure1: Framework of “DAIDO” Ecocriticism Analysis (adapted from Buell, 2001)

#### 4. FINDINGS

The discussion of this section will start off with an in depth analysis of the individual poets’ perception and treatment of nature which will then be followed by the identification of the poets’ stand according to the DAIDO ecocriticism analysis. The section will end with a comparative analysis of the two Asian poets who will be compared with the Western poets to identify the similarities and differences between them. All discussions in this section will be directly linked to the study which is on ecocriticism i.e. to see the link between literature and the endangered world.

##### 4.1 Analysis of Individual Poems

Cecil Rajendra is a Malaysian poet whose work encompasses various perceptions of nature. In his poem “The Death of a Rainforest”, Rajendra deals with the theme of environmental destruction where he portrays the destruction as man’s blatant disregard of nature in favour of money. Rajendra paints the scene of destruction in a vivid manner by using a highly selected diction enriched with imagery and personification . The poem starts by giving the readers an account of nature in a negative light where nature is shown to be dying. This is portrayed by the phrases “trees crashing”, “birds screeching” and “buffalo stampeding”. The use of present continuous tense gives a picture of immediacy. This when

followed by a contrasting joyful picture of man and his actions as seen in the phrases “sawmills buzzing”, “registers clicking” and “entrepreneurs yam-seng-ing” adds to the callous attitude of man towards nature drawing a picture of man “partying” while nature is dying. The refrain “but no words will come” which is repeated five times before ending with ‘yes, no words will fill’ in the last stanza captures Rajendra’s emotional reaction to the destruction of nature as one of speechlessness and frustration. The intensity of the whole scene unfolding before the readers is made more evident and stark when the past tense is used to reflect the condition of nature’s inhabitants seen in the phrases “the rhino is boxed and crated/merbok and meranti are gone/ above, no monkeys swing/from no overhead branches”. The repetition of the word “no” clearly shows that both flora and fauna are affected by man’s selfish actions. It must be noted at this point that Rajendra uses onomatopoeia extensively as a device to capture both the gory details of the rainforest’s inhabitants’ predicament and the heartless enjoyment of mankind. Attention must also be drawn to the lower case ‘i’ which is the first word in the first five stanzas. It is believed that Rajendra is trying to convey to the readers a sense of powerlessness for he sees himself as insignificant in the greater destruction taking place around him. It can also be something to ponder on when we see that Rajendra appears to have taken a step back from the destruction for in stanza 1 we see a personal encounter with nature in the phrase “I wrestle with a rhinoceros” but in the subsequent stanzas, he only “hear(s)” which indicates a distancing from the destruction. Could this be an admission of withdrawal?

Another element of interest in the poem is the stanza which deals with the world’s reaction towards nature’s destruction which is seen by the series of nouns that is used by Rajendra. “[P]ress conferences”, “petitions”, “signatures”, “campaigns” and “lobbying” which signifies nature’s destruction is not something that is silently observed for it does set off a series of outcry. However, it seems that all these attempts are ineffective for Rajendra ends these lines with the repetitive refrain “but no words will come”. These ineffective attempts are affirmed in the next stanza when Rajendra says that he could “hear the rain pounding/ into desolate spaces” indicating nature has been made barren. The metaphor and personification seen in the phrase “widowed wind howling” lucidly captures the state of the wind being isolated due to the loss of the other inhabitants of the rainforest comprising plant and animal life. The word “howling” which is associated with cries of animals has been used aptly to depict the excruciating pain the wind is experiencing metaphorically. This anguish that the wind is facing is further echoed in the stumbling of the pangolin “around amputated trunks” and the “orphaned butterfly” surveying “the wounded jungle”. The use of war terminology such as “amputated”, “orphaned” and “wounded” intensifies nature’s near annihilation. Like the word “howling” the word “wounded” too creates a sense of pain and suffering. The poem ends with a vivid imagery where anger is personified as a man squatting and hugging his knees in silence. This imagery is abstract for it gives room for a number of interpretations. In line with the researcher’s DAIDO ecocriticism analysis, the imagery is taken to represent “impotence” or helplessness where man is appalled at the destruction of nature in the name of development and materialism but is unable to do anything about it.

Rajendra’s “The Death of a Village” projects similar views where he presents the death of a rainforest. However, the intensity of feelings evoked is more profound and the treatment as well as reactions towards nature’s destruction is different. Like in “The Death of a Rainforest”, the theme is on the destruction of nature but in this poem Rajendra denounces urban and technological modernity for it is causing the death of a village. Unlike in “The Death of a Rainforest”, this poem starts by giving the readers a very bleak picture of the surroundings. The poem starts with images of death and this is seen through the phrase “stench of decay and despair”. The personification of “intimations of death” hanging “heavy in the air” conveys a very depressing view of the persona’s surroundings. The view projected is one of total dismal. Rajendra uses personification in abundance where he personifies, the river, the fish, the birds and the village. These personifications capture the negative effect of industrialization and hinges on the act of uncontrolled development as foul and dirty. This is seen in “exigencies of industrialization”, “progress’s vomit” and “progress’s excrement”. The impending extinction of nature’s inhabitants are portrayed clearly through the repetitive progression of the word die as quoted below:

2nd stanza-	The river...is dying...
3rd stanza-	The fish are dying...
4th stanza-	The birds are dying...
5th stanza-	...a once proud village...dies...

The changes from “is dying”, “are dying”, and finally “dies” conveys an idea that nature which was in the midst of destruction (shown in the use of present continuous tense, “is dying” and “are dying”) has now reached its ultimate destruction (shown in the use of the present tense, “die”). What makes this projection more penetrating on the readers is that these phrases are immediately followed by the refrain ‘and nobody cares’ showing insensitivity on the part of mankind.

Using the DAIDO ecocriticism analysis at this point, we can conclude that the poet is in a state of denial. This state of denial is further illustrated in stanza 6 where the poet uses “our” repeatedly to convey universality and then it is

followed by “and nobody cares” when it is sacrificed. This indicates a sense of universal destruction which ends with mankind’s indifference. The following lines are evidence of this perception:

our high priests  
sacrifice  
our customs  
our culture  
our traditions  
and environment  
and nobody cares

The words “customs”, “culture”, “traditions” and “environment” embraces the whole of mankind’s make-up. Similarly, the “river”, the “fish”, the “birds” and the “village” encompasses the components of nature. Thus, through the portrayal of their death or sacrifice, it can be seen as a hyperbole signifying the endangered state of the world. Rajendra’s choice of words can be said to be unusual as seen in the phrases “progress’s vomit” and “progress’s excrement”. The use of oxymoron blatantly draw the reader’s attention to the negativity brought on by development which is further intensified through the capitalization of the word “DEVELOPMENT” to a godly status seen in the word ‘mammon’.

Two other elements in the poem that needs to be addressed are the allusions to the nursery rhyme “Three Blind Mice” and the rhetorical question on which the poem ends. Here the nursery rhyme is parodied through the changes in the words used: “The Three Blind Mice” is now “we blind mice”; “the farmer’s wife” becomes “Progress’s wife” ; “carving knife” becomes “Development’s knife” and cutting off “their tails” becomes cutting off “our heads”. These changes in the age-old rhyme symbolises the retributive consequences where the farmer’s wife cut of the tails of the rats that destroyed her grain, and here we see how “Progress’s wife” which is personified cuts of mankind’s head for his deeds of destruction. Ariffin (2008, 5) is of the same opinion where he claims “the parody is a ridicule of the senseless act of pursuing development at the cost of the environment”. The parody is effective for the cutting off of the head has a two-fold interpretation implying either the death of rationality of mankind or his physical death. The retributive action is emphasised further by the repetitive acknowledgement “see what we’ve done”. When we apply the DAIDO ecocriticism analysis, we can see that there is a change in the perception and treatment of nature’s destruction where from the state of denial, he progresses to a state of acquiescence which is shown in the repetitive “see what we have done” and “We all ran after Progress’s wife”. Subsequently, the poet’s state of mind turns into one of desperation and outrage, which is revealed through the rhetorical question “have you ever seen such fools in your life as we blind mice?”

An analysis of Boey Kim Cheng’s “Report to Wordsworth” and “The Planners” indicates some similarities and differences with Rajendra poems. Boey’s “Report to Wordsworth” emulates Wordsworth’s focus on the passing of certain values in the name of development, such as in “London”, “1802”, “Composed Upon Westminster Bridge” and “The World is Too Much with Us. But unlike Wordsworth’s use of the Petrarchan sonnet form, Boey uses the Shakespearian sonnet form with the rhyming couplet. Here in this poem, Boey deals with time and the effects of pollution on nature. It gives an overview of the lack of respect humans have towards the natural environment in current times. The poems start with the emphatic outcry that nature is in need of help. This is seen in the first line of the first stanza, “You should be here, / Nature has need of you” which is an outburst for the return of Wordsworth. This clearly tells the readers that the current environment is in dire straits that there is a need for the presence of Wordsworth, one of the renowned Romantic poets who often celebrated the beauty and spiritual values of the natural world. Boey’s choice of words such as “smothered”, “entombed”, “choked”, “dazed” and “labouring” encapsulates the endangered world as he sees it. The verbs are closely linked to images of death. Not only does Boey portray the environment as being polluted but he also conveys death as something gradual and painful. The use of personification as seen in the “flowers are mute, and the birds are few” as a result of the “smog” which smothers them is vivid example of this slow progression to death. The word “entombed” is in itself a bleak and depressive thought but Boey, by conveying how this entombment is not in a casket but in the waste we dump adds to the gloominess. Furthermore, the fact that Boey says that it is “Proteus” who is entombed in such a manner, the readers are taken to another level of Greek mythology where the God of the sea is seen to be submerged in the waste and garbage that we throw into the sea. Another allusion to the Greek myth is seen in the lines “Triton’s notes struggle to be free, / his famous horns are chocked, / his eyes are dazed”. This conveys to us that even Triton, the messenger of the sea who is said to be able to calm and raise the waves with his conch, is not spared and becomes a victim of man’s pollution of the sea. Next, Boey goes on to compare the Roman God of the sea, “Neptune” with a “beached whale”. This is ironic because Neptune is known to be immortal and cannot die by any conventional means. Yet, he “lies helpless”. This serves to highlight the grave magnitude of the damage done by man.

With reference to the DAIDO Ecocriticism analysis, Boey’s reaction towards the endangered world is one of impotence which is seen in the conclusion where nature is personified having a big heart but yet “lying still” and God, the supreme- being is “labouring to utter his last cry”. The impotence is seen not only in man’s reaction to bring about

some changes but also can be considered in biblical terms of God's impotence to bring changes for the last cry could be interpreted as him wanting to start anew, reminding us of the great flood. Some critics would interpret the cry to reawaken Wordsworth as an act of desperation which regresses into impotence because at the back of Boey's head he would realise that this request for Wordsworth to return is futile.

Unlike the "Report to Wordsworth", Boey's "The Planners" is based on a theme closer to heart for it is a criticism on the way Singapore has been planned and built. Boey shows responses to an assessment of the city planners, architects and designers and the way they carry out their task in the name of development. This poem makes us reflect on the metaphysical poets such as John Donne, Andrew Marvel, George Herbert, Abraham Cowley and Richard Crashaw and Henry Vaughan, who were known for their unconventional openings which dramatic and shocking. For instance, Donne's "The Canonization" where he opens with "For God's sake hold your tongue and let me love". In Boey's poem "The Planners", these parallel phrases, "They plan", "They build", have the same effect of grabbing the attention of the readers. This stark introduction to the planners followed by the phrase "permutation of possibilities" can be perceived as a positive portrayal of the planning and building. This positive portrayal is further strengthened in the following phrases:

All spaces are grided,  
...the buildings are in alignment with the  
roads  
Which meet at desired points  
Linked by bridges...  
In the grace of mathematics.

These lines convey structures that have mathematical precision. However, the hidden negativity is captured in the line "they build and will not stop". The continuous building shows the frenzy behaviour of the planners is at the cost of both nature and history. This is seen in the personification of the seas and the skies as shown in the lines quoted:

Even the sea draws back  
And the skies surrender.

These lines are so vivid that they become imageries that allow the readers to actually visualize what he is saying. It shocks the readers to perceive these large elements of nature taking a step back or surrendering to make way for development. In essence, what Boey is describing is the immense sky scrapers and the reclaiming of land from the sea in Singapore. The use of dental analogy seen in the lines "knock off useless blocks with dental dexterity/ All gaps are plugged with gleaming gold/ The country wears perfect rows of shining teeth" draws a picture of not only perfection in the planners buildings but it also highlights the perfectness by which society is being blinded to the state of the endangered landscape. Many modern readers have categorized these lines to be a conceit, a literary tool in line with simile and metaphor where one element is compared to another element which does not share similarities and would appear as an unusual comparison. The literary device of conceit has its origins from the metaphysical poets where unusual and unbelievable comparisons are made. These comparisons are made convincing through its extension or elaborations. Examples would be where John Donne compares a pair of lovers to a compass and a flea to marriage itself. These dental images create a perception that the whole process of planning and building is done in a mechanical, cold and heartless fashion where artificial beautification takes place. "Anaesthesia, amnesia, and hypnosis" are terms associated with the medical world which are used to describe patients' conditions encompassing loss of consciousness, forgetfulness, entrapment and numbness. These terms convey the idea that individuals have been induced by a third person's intervention or via a unnatural traumatic experience to be in a state where the past has been erased from their memories and they have been subtly forced into accepting the re-written history without feeling the hurt.

Using the DAIDO ecocriticism analysis, Boey is showing mankind to be in a state of acquiescence both voluntarily and involuntarily. This state of acquiescence is not shared by Boey himself for the lines "But my heart would not bleed/poetry. Not a single drop/to stain the blueprint of our past's tomorrow" clearly indicates that he is in a state of outrage where he blames the planners as the perpetrators of the doomed future, and in retaliation he refuses to create poetry about the planners actions. His decision is ironic because the poem is about them and their doings. Another point to note is that Boey's line "but my heart would not bleed" alludes to Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" where she uses the line "my heart bleeds". Thus, we can conclude that Boey unlike Shelley who finds poetry as a medium to worship nature and creation which is intermingled with her hopes, is reluctant to use poetry in this manner as all he sees is that it would "stain the blueprint/of our past's tomorrow."

Margaret Atwood's, a Canadian poet presents an unappealing picture of modern day suburbia which has been planned rigidly making it appear monotonous and boring in her poem "The City Planners". The monotony and boredom is vividly conveyed in the lines "the houses in pedantic rows" and "the roofs all display the same slant". Atwood starts

the poems by projecting a false sense of serenity and this is evident in the use of the verb “cruising” which is the first word of the poem. When readers initially start to read the poem, they would link the word “cruising” with the image of journeying during holidays and the fact that Atwood chose this cruising to have taken place on a “Sunday” along a residential street in sunlight strengthens this false sense of tranquillity. This sense of serenity is short-lived as readers are taken aback when Atwood claims that the sanities comprising the “houses in pedantic rows”, the “planted sanitary trees”, “levelness of surface” is offensive. The readers would be confused as to why these are considered offensive. It is only when she portrays the absence of sounds “no shouting here”, or “shatter of glass” that the readers see the significance of the offence. The scenario is not typical of what is expected of a lovely Sunday afternoon. The lack of shouting and shattering of glass metaphorically tells us that there are no children laughing and playing in that area. The whole scene lacks luster.

Atwood also uses symbols to show the unnatural scenery. The power mower is the only machinery that emits sound. Even so, the word “whine” is a pathetic attempt at sound. Instead of emitting a roaring and loud sound, it lets out a sound which does not draw attention to itself. It almost does not want to disturb the silence. On the whole the picture portrayed is one of soullessness, emotionless and coldness. This is clearly seen in the personification of the grass. As readers we know that grass is one of the elements that have the freedom to grow without boundaries. Here, Atwood says that the grass is discouraged. The word “discouraged” creates an image in our mind of nature’s dampened spirits. This can be linked to the “whine” of the mower as both the mower and the grass are disheartened and are unable to react naturally in this perfect, uniformed environment. The verb “rebuke” which is used as a simile to link the houses and the trees which are so perfectly built and planted is seen to be a reproach to the “dent on our car door”.

Having successfully planted an unfavourable image of the city in the minds of the readers, Atwood is able to smoothly transit into stanza 4 where she blames the city planners with boldness. The phrases “insane faces”, “own private blizzard”, “guessing directions” and “sketched transitory lines” conveys the message that these planners are in fact pursuing development without rationalizing the impact of their actions on nature and their inhabitants. The metaphorical phrase “the city planners/with the insane faces of political conspirators” gives us a picture that there is a hidden agenda behind the actions of the city planners. And readers would come to a conclusion that the whole action is motivated by money and power. The phrase “bland madness of snow” with which this poem ends, can be considered as a metaphor for the insipid and homogeneous city.

If we were to evaluate Atwood’s “City Planners” from the angle of the DAIDO ecocriticism analysis, we can say that her treatment and perception of the endangered world is one of outrage. Without any hesitation, she blames the city planners for the destruction of nature through linking the idea of madness and insanity not only to the manner in which they carry out their constructions but also to their mental state. One interesting point to note in this poem is that Atwood, unlike many other poets who are environmentalist and who would end their poem on a note of nature resilience to man actions, does this, in the middle of this poem where we are shown how man’s constructions despite the thoroughness in which it is done will eventually “capsize” and “slide obliquely into clay seas”. She exalts nature’s supremacy by stating that the future is in its control and unfortunately man is ignorant and this is captured in the lines “right now nobody notices”.

Atwood’s “The Moment” deals with the relationship between man and nature in a direct manner. The title is significant and Atwood repeats the word in the first line. The significance is that Atwood is drawing attention to a specific moment of man’s life when he comes to a realization that despite achieving all that is possible to achieve he actually has not achieved anything. This is captured in the last line of the first stanza “I own this” and the first line of the 3rd stanza “You own nothing”. The confidence that the speaker has is undermined in stanza 3 when nature in a collective form whispers that he has nothing. When we look at the “I” in stanza one and compare it with the “they” in stanza 3, we see how insignificant man is.

The beauty of Atwood’s poem is that she captures the span of man’s experience through the listing method “your room, /house, half-acre, square mile, island, country”. Atwood also uses phrases such as “after many years” and “a long voyage” to reiterate the idea that life is an on- going journey and there is no end to attaining knowledge or even comprehending the world. This is proven in the 3rd stanza when nature remind man, that his perception of having conquered the world is not true seen the lines “We never belonged to you./ You never found us/ It was always the other way round.”

What captures the reader’s attention is that the first line of the 2nd stanza is a run-on line with the last line of the 1st stanza. Using this technique of run-on lines between the two stanzas is very effective in linking the ideas together. This combined with the variation of the repetition in the first line of the first stanza and the first line of the second stanza as seen in “the moment” and “is the same moment” links the idea in both stanzas cogently. Atwood draws the readers’ attention to the fact that the moment when man thinks that he has it all is the very moment that nature stands up

to remind mankind that without support from it there is no achievement at all. This is seen in the lines “the air moves back from you like a wave”. There is also an indication in stanza 2, that man in his desire of worldly pursuits has neglected nature causing its destruction as captured through the personification of the “trees”, “birds”, “cliffs” and “air” as breaking away from man. These four nouns represent the plant-life, the animal life, the earth and the sky; all the four key elements of nature that are crucial for man’s survival.

From the DAIDO ecocriticism perspective, this poem has a different stance compared to the poems discussed earlier. Here instead of projecting her perception and treatment of nature, Atwood shows how nature perceives man’s attitude towards nature. Thus, nature is drawing man out of his state of denial into a realm of acquiescence where nature demands that man recognizes the negative implications of his action.

Stanley Kunitz’s “The War Against the Trees” is a narrative poem describing man’s war against nature. In an interview with Kunitz, critic Selden Rodman, asserts that the poem was an early ecological statement. The theme of the poem is the destruction of nature in the name of industrialization and modernization. This essence of the poem is captured in the very first two lines, “the man who sold his lawn to standard oil/ Joked with his neighbours come to watch the show”. The word “joked” captures the heartless and insensitive attitude of mankind and the word “show” is an understatement because a show is usually linked to a carnival-like atmosphere but what is on “show” here is the ultimate destruction of nature. The personification of the “bulldozers” shown in the phrase “drunk with gasoline” which (tested) “the virtue of the soil” conveys the image of rape. It is as if man is plundering and abusing nature causing nature’s despoliation. Kunitz successfully gains the empathy of readers towards nature’s predicament through the use of war images. Example of these images can be seen in the lines, “By overthrowing first the privet-row”, “preliminaries to a war”, “they struck and struck again”, “maimed” “charged”, and “forcing the giants to their knees”.

These phrases capture in a vivid manner the progression of war from the initial attack to the point where the enemies are captured. The use of abundance of metaphors, Kunitz effectively projects the implication of man’s activities on age-old nature. For example, “great-grandfathers of the town”, “giant” and “raw gorgons” which are used to refer to the trees on the land suggest strongly and lucidly that nature inhabitants despite their age and strength are helpless against man’s actions.

This picture of destruction is also conveyed using images of pain and suffering through the use of words such as “freshly locked and maimed”, “ripped” and “amputated” which intensify the cruelty of mankind. By Kunitz using the flashback technique, where he shares his personal experience “I saw the ghosts of children at their games/Racing beyond their childhood in the shade” contrasts the current scene of destruction to a time of joy and happiness in the past. From the DAIDO ecocriticism standpoint, Kunitz’s stand is one of outrage. This is seen in the manner the poem ends. The line “in the rear-view mirrors of the passing cars”, shocks the readers for the whole painful scene that the poet unfolded before us is merely acknowledged by the drivers when by chance they looked into the “rear-view mirror after having passed the spot. The language of the whole poem captures the state of anger and indignation of the poet at the way nature is destroyed in the name of industrialization.

Kunitz’s poem, “Snakes of September” gives a thorough description of nature. The relationship between man and nature is limited to only a few lines but the lines leave a deep impact. Kunitz starts his poem by conveying to the readers a positive view about the snakes. He shows their dynamism through active words like “rustling” “outracing”, “flashed” and “pulsing”. These words convey a very positive view about the snakes as well as nature which is home for them. It also captures the symbiotic relationship between plant and animal. The persona reveals himself as an observer and there seems to be no connection or relationship between him and the other two entities. The persona who thought the snakes would be gone in September realizes that his assumption is wrong and the snakes showed their supremacy not only through their presence in September but also in the way they make their presence known. This is captured in the lines “In the deceptive balm/ of noon, as if defiant of the curse/that spoiled another garden,/these two appear on show”. The word “defiant” and “show” captures nature’s attempt at reiterating to man as to its resilience. The fact that the pair of snakes reveal themselves through a “narrow slit” indicates that man cannot barricade its freedom of movement. The phrase “entwined in a brazen love-knot” shows their boldness and their lack of fear for man. The last line of the poem “At my touch the wild/ braid of creation/ trembles” can be taken to be a response to Kunitz claim that man and nature are partners who are “co-signers of a covenant”. The trembling can be seen as an abstract term. It can be interpreted from the biblical point of view where the snake tempted Eve causing Adam and Eve to be expelled from the garden. This reading is plausible for it can be linked to the previous lines where there is reference to the “curse” and “spoiled garden”. If this reading is accepted, it would project a view that is consistent with the researchers’ interpretation of the poem as one portraying the supremacy of nature over man. Reading along these lines, the “trembles” could also be a sign to indicate that they are very much alive despite the “dry-grit of their skins”. This interpretation is possible if we were to take the word “curse” and “spoiled garden” to generally mean a destruction of nature’s gardens by the “curse” of man’s acts of destruction.



Critics have praise Kunitz for his subtle use of sound and sense as well as for the use of power and intensity (Contemporary Literary Criticism, 2002). “The Snakes of September” can be seen to encapsulate this idea. From the DAIDO ecocriticism perspective it can be concluded that in this poem, Kunitz is adopting an acquiescence stance towards man and nature. He admits that nature and man co-exist but their existence are on their own terms. Neither can be taken for granted as they affect each other since the times of Adam and Eve.

#### 4.2 *Comparative Analysis of Asian and Western Poets*

Under the DAIDO ecocriticism analysis, there are five kinds of reaction that poets can have towards the destruction of the environment. These reactions range on a spectrum from Denial to Acquiescence, Impotence, Desperation and Outrage. Each of these reactions conveys a specific state of mind on the part of the poets. It must be noted in the offset that some of these poets adopt an array of responses and move from one stance to another.

Denial is a stance where poets simply choose to ignore that the environment is endangered and turn a blind eye to the effects of destruction in the name of development and materialism. Two poets who project this stance are Cecil Rajendra in his poem “Death of a Village” and Margaret Atwood in her poem “The Moment”. The themes of both poems are the destruction of nature but the way they are presented is totally different. In “The Death of a Village”, Rajendra uses stanzas with short lines between one to four words to portray bluntly mankind’s actions towards nature while Atwood uses longer lines and caesura, such as “and say”, “I own this”, and “no they whisper”. “You own nothing” to show the superiority of nature over man. The selection of elements of nature is similar in both poems for example, the use of “birds” and “air”. In Rajendra’s poem, he talks about the “intimations of death/ hangs/heavy in the air” while Atwood talks about the air moving “back from you like a wave/ and you can’t breathe”. Both give the idea that the air is polluted. In Rajendra’s poem, the “birds” are poisoned by “Progress’s excrement” while in Atwood’s poem the “birds take back their language” suggesting the extinction of birds. The stance of denial is conveyed differently in Rajendra’s poem. The repetition “and nobody cares” (5x) shows this stance. While in Atwood’s “The Moment” the denial is perceived from nature’s outlook of man’s attitude. Thus, unlike the poem “The Death of a Village” where the poet accuses man of not caring, in Atwood’s poem, nature is accusing man of misconception. It must be noted that in these two poems, the poets transcend from denial to acquiescence but the transition is also done differently. In “The Death of a Village”, the transition is seen in the rhetoric question which comes after the parody of the nursery rhyme “The Three Blind Mice”. The poem ended with man coming to a realisation that he has caused devastation to the environment and he has been blind in the sense that he had not acknowledged it so far. On the other hand, in “The Moment”, Atwood through the personification of nature, forces man to come to a state of acquiescence that no matter what man does in the destruction of the environment, nature is still a force to be reckoned with. Compared to the other six poems, it is only in these two poems that we see a transition in man’s reaction towards nature according to the DAIDO ecocriticism analysis.

In comparison, Boey Kim Cheng’s “The Planners” and Stanley Kunitz’s “Snakes of September” show some similarities for both poets adopt a state of acquiescence. As explained under the DAIDO ecocriticism analysis, acquiescence is a state where man acknowledges that he has played a role in the destruction of the environment. Both poets use similar literary devices to present this state of acceptance. The first device would be the use of personification. However, the way it is used is different. In “The Planners”, Boey personifies the country as “wearing perfect rows of shining teeth”. This personification conveys the idea that the country is perfectly developed but what captures the attention of the readers is, instead of using the country “has”, he says the country “wears”, suggesting an artificiality. It is like being robbed in a beautiful attire. If he had used the word “has” it would convey a more realistic picture. Kunitz also uses personification in his poem. For example, “a signal flashed from the hedgerow” and “shadow pulsing /in barberry thicket” which encapsulate the life force in nature. These personifications leave a deep impact in the minds of the readers as to the unnaturalness of the on-going buildings in “The Planners” and the inner- life of the snakes in the “Snakes of September”. Both poets also use a lot of verbs but a striking difference is that in Boey’s “The Planners”, the verbs are either in the present or past tense, for example, “plan”, “build”, “filled”, “meet” and “linked” which indicates the impact of man’s activities on nature which is taking place continuously. In “The Snakes of September”, Kunitz uses a lot of verbs in the present continuous tense “rustling”, “outracing”, “pulsing” and “dangling”. These verbs used in the present continuous tense gives immediacy to the poems. Both poets have also aptly chosen words to project their state of acquiescence. Words and phrases such as “gleaming gold”, “shining teeth” and the “grace of mathematics” show the artificiality of the constructions which lack the natural throb of life. In “The Snakes of September” Kunitz uses a lot of words describing nature’s greenery such as “shrubbery”, “garden”, “viburnums”, hedgerow”, “barberry thicket”, “dense green brocade” and “spruce”. These words make the scenery come alive and man is forced to acknowledge nature’s presence.

Cecil Rajendra's "The Death of the Rainforest" and Kunitz's "The War Against the Trees" are both poems that discuss the fate of nature, specifically the trees. Although the themes are similar, the perception and treatment are different. Rajendra reveals a state of impotence under the DAIDO ecocriticism analysis while Kunitz reveals the projection of outrage. The difference in their stand is revealed through the tone, diction and structure of the poems. Rajendra has a unique structure where the first stanza consists of two lines and the remaining four stanzas consist of four lines each. In the first stanza, we are given a sense of immediacy, where Rajendra uses the phrase "I wrestle" indicating a physical combat which ends in the inability to express the anguish that he feels. In the other four stanzas, there is a distancing on the part of Rajendra where he no longer wrestles but rather hears as seen in the empathetic repetition of the phrase "I hear". The tone and the words used conveys clearly the anger that he experiences at the destruction of the rainforest. The use of two-syllable words and three-syllable words such as "crashing", "screeching", "stampeding", "pounding" and "howling" captures the frustration that he goes through at seeing the destruction. Further war images such as "amputated", "orphaned", "wounded" and "gashed" captures the pain of nature metaphorically. Despite the frustration and anger shown in the selection of words and tone, the poem ends on a note of impotence seen in the personification of anger, squatting "hugging its knees in silence". On the other hand, the structure of Kunitz's, "The War Against the Trees" appears more like a narrative with Kunitz giving an account of the incident from the moment "the man who sold his lawn to standard oil" to the point where the "great-grandfathers of the town" are "ripped from the craters" and concludes by stating bluntly that for the rest of society, all these are just sights seen in the "rear-view mirrors of the passing cars". Kunitz like Rajendra also uses war terminology as seen in the words and phrases "over throwing", "preliminaries to a war", "maimed", and "charged".

The last two poems in the collection of the poems analysed are Margaret Atwood's "City Planners" and Boey Kim Cheng's "Report to Wordsworth". These poems show more similarities than differences. In terms of the DAIDO ecocriticism analysis, both poems end in outrage. The difference is that Boey in "Report to Wordsworth" starts on a note of acquiescence that subsequently turns to outrage. Boey, unlike the other poets discussed, uses a lot of allusion related to both Greek and Roman mythology. The selection of the words used in relation to these mythological characters such as "Proteus/is entombed in the waste/we dump", "Triton's notes struggle to be free" and "Neptune lies helpless as beached as a whale/while insatiate man moves in for the kill" are all clear evidences of Boey's outrage at man's treatment of nature. The earlier state of acquiescence can be seen in his call for Wordsworth's return as "Nature has need of [him]" indicating that Boey is aware that nature is slowly being annihilated. In "The City Planners", Atwood too conveys outrage at the acts of mankind in destroying the natural beauty of the environment through perfect construction of cities which have killed individuality. Her outrage is captured vividly through her sharp insinuation of city planners being plagued by madness.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Ecocriticism is a new approach to the study of literature. Today, ecocriticism has distinguished itself not withstanding debates first by the ethical stand it takes, it's commitment to the natural world as an important thing rather than simply as an object of thematic study and secondly by its commitment to making a connection" (Mazel, 2000). Analysing the poems using this approach would give readers an insight into how poets react to mankind's acts of accelerating destruction of the world. An analysis of the selected poets of the Eastern and Western poets in this study indicates that there are a number of similarities and differences in the way the poets perceive and address the destruction of nature. One glaring difference is that the Western poets such as Margaret Atwood and Stanley Kunitz are more outspoken and are able to show their outrage openly unlike Asian poets who do it more subtly.

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