



From Anthropocentrism to Ecocentrism: Deep Ecology and Biocentric Egalitarianism in Edward Bond's *The Sea*

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Abstract

*This paper adopts Arne Naess' deep ecology paradigm to champion a transformative shift from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism within Edward Bond's *The Sea*. Deep ecology envisions an ecological self that practices biocentric egalitarianism, recognizing the inherent equality of all natural entities. *The Sea* strikingly portrays the turbulent interaction between humanity and nature, with the sea's immense power symbolizing nature's indifferent majesty. Collins' journey of self-realization reflects deep ecology's imperative to harmonize one's potential with the broader biosphere. His eventual embrace of the sea's dual nature—both turbulent and tranquil—represents a profound expansion of his ecological self, where he acknowledges his role within the intricate web of life. Conversely, Hatch epitomizes the destructive fallout of an anthropocentric worldview, marked by delusion and chaos. This paper elucidates the complex interplay between human existence and the natural world, highlighting *The Sea*'s cautionary message about the need to restore environmental balance by addressing the harm caused by (in)human actions. It advocates against the practices of ecocide and promotes biocentric egalitarianism as a path toward ecological harmony.*

Key words: Edward Bond, Ecocentrism, Anthropocentrism, Deep ecology, Self-realisation

Introduction

Edward Bond, a distinguished English playwright, poet, screenwriter, and theatrical director, has profoundly influenced the world of theatre with his extensive body of work, comprising over fifty plays. His notable contributions include *Saved* (1965), which played a pivotal role in ending theatrical censorship in the UK, as well as *Narrow Road to the Deep North* (1968), *Lear* (1971), *The Sea* (1973), *The Fool* (1975), *Restoration* (1981), and *The War Trilogy* (1985). Bond is renowned for his provocative portrayal of violence, his critical perspectives on contemporary society and theatre, and his unconventional style, which have often sparked controversy. His achievements have been recognized with several awards, including the John Whiting Award in 1968 and the Obie Award in 1976, affirming his significant impact and ongoing legacy in the theatre world, where his works continue to incite debate and critique.

In *The Sea*, the narrative unfolds in a seaside village beset by a violent storm, which triggers a series of dramatic events. Willy's courageous attempt to rescue his friend Colin from the storm is hampered by the reluctance of other villagers, including Evens, who speaks incoherently, and Hatch, a draper paralyzed by irrational fears of an extraterrestrial invasion. Hatch's fears prevent him from assisting Willy. Mrs. Rafi, a stern middle-class woman and social worker, plays a significant role in the community, questioning Hatch's absence during Colin's drowning and revealing that she had nominated him to the Coast Guard. She also orders materials from him for

a fundraising event. Willy later recounts the villagers' refusal to help after Colin's drowning, and the body of Colin is eventually discovered. Hatch, driven by his fear of alien possession, encounters the corpse in Willy and Colin's fiancée Rose's absence, leading to a confrontation with Willy and his subsequent flight. In a fit of despair, Hatch injures Mrs. Rafi and is arrested by the police. Mrs. Rafi advises Rose and Willy to leave town and build a new future elsewhere, as they depart to escape the haunting past and the unchanging reality of the town.

Arne Naess advocates for a profound reorientation in human engagement with nature through his deep ecology framework--- emphasizing the importance of ecological integrity for fostering peace. This approach, developed in response to shallow environmentalism that is driven by anthropocentric motives, calls for a shift from exploiting nature for human benefit to recognizing the intrinsic value of all life forms. Naess' deep ecology highlights the interdependence and interaction between humans and the natural world, asserting that the preservation of ecosystem diversity and integrity is essential. He argues that humans should seek a strengthened connection with nature to achieve a comprehensive understanding and to honor its inherent worth.

Deep ecology's paradigm posits that the interdependence of all living organisms dissolves traditional boundaries between the self and the other, leading to the concept of an ecological self. According to Arne Naess, this ecological self represents the idea that humans are integral to the natural environment, contributing to its unity rather than existing apart from it. As Naess articulates, "The self is expanded and extended to include the biosphere or all of nature, and the human being becomes a link in the great chain of being" (Naess 1989, 62). Central to Naess's deep ecology is the principle of biocentric equality, which challenges the notion that humans hold exclusive moral authority over the natural world. This principle asserts that the intrinsic value of all living beings is independent of their utility to human needs: "Biocentric equality means that all living beings have an equal right to live and blossom and to reach their own individual forms of unfolding and self-realization" (Naess 1989, 68). Consequently, it is morally imperative to consider the well-being and flourishing of all life, both human and nonhuman.

Deep ecology envisions an ecological self that advances ecological sustainability by expanding one's sense of identity to include all of nature. This broader self, which encompasses both living and non-living entities, fosters a profound connection with the natural world and supports the pursuit of self-realization. Arne Naess defines self-realization as "developing one's own abilities, talents, and potentialities as fully as possible in harmony with the entire biosphere" (Naess, 2008, 78). Deep ecology critiques contemporary industrial lifestyles, which are major contributors to environmental damage and degradation, ultimately compromising human well-being. Naess argues that protecting natural life necessitates a critical response to consumerism and materialism.

The tendency of humanity to perpetrate ecocide represents a profound breach of biocentric egalitarianism. As Edward Bond articulates, "I believe the universe lives. It teems with life. Men take themselves to be very strong and cunning. But who can kill space or time or dust? They destroy everything, but they only make the materials of life. All destruction is finally petty and in the end life laughs at death" (Bond, 268). This observation underscores the futility of human attempts to establish permanent dominion over nature, particularly in the face of relentless environmental degradation that fractures the human-nature relationship and heralds potential calamity for humanity. In *The Sea*, Colin's demise at the hands of nature's wrath symbolizes the impotence of human power against the formidable forces of the sea. The play serves as a cautionary tale, urging humanity to reevaluate its relationship with the natural world. An ecocentric approach,

advocating for the intrinsic value of all life and the preservation of ecosystems, offers a pathway to restoring environmental balance and remedying the damage inflicted by human actions.

Literature Review

Schmidt Swetlana Nasrawi's thesis, "Deep Ecology and Self-Realization in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," invites readers to explore Shakespeare's play through an ecological lens, offering profound insights into humanity's impact on the health of ecological systems. The thesis argues that deep ecology calls for a fundamental rethinking of our relationship with the land, urging us to see ourselves as integral parts of Earth's interconnected ecosystems rather than as a dominant species. As Schmidt explains, "Deep ecology is radical because it requires us to develop a wider sense of self as part of the earth's ecosystem rather than as a superior species. It requires strong identification with nonhuman living beings" (Schmidt 14). By weaving allegorical interpretations with the principles of deep ecology, a philosophy founded by mountaineer Arne Naess, the thesis advocates for a deeper connection with nature and the recognition that non-human beings possess the same inherent right to life as humans. The paper also delves into the ecological landscape of Elizabethan England and offers a rich allegorical reading of the characters Jack Bottom and Puck as intermediaries between nature and social order.

In his work, "Naess's Deep Ecology: Implications for the Human Prospect and Challenges for the Future," Harold Glasser explores Arne Naess' deep ecology philosophy, emphasizing its core themes of interconnection and interdependence between humans and all other entities. Glasser describes deep ecology as "an outline of a philosophy of life, which draws on an expansive conception of rationality to support and develop our capacities to identify with all living beings. It calls for individuals to embrace wide-identifying ultimate norms... ecologically inspired total views or ecosophies" (Glasser 60). He highlights that deep ecology offers a transformative approach to environmental protection by prioritizing environmental activism and legislation, distinguishing itself from traditional environmentalism. According to Glasser, Naess' philosophy challenges the anthropocentric perspective of human dominance over nature, advocating instead for a fundamental shift in human values that places the environment at the forefront and acknowledges its integral role within the broader ecological community. This shift entails a greater emphasis on ecological sustainability and the preservation of biodiversity.

Salma Khatoon's article, "Abjection and Taboo Objects in Edward Bond's Plays," examines Edward Bond's frequent portrayal of violence and madness, drawing on Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection to elucidate the function, aesthetics, politics, and significance of his works. Khatoon argues that, within the framework of abjection—initially developed in a psychoanalytic context—Bond's depiction of violence and horror challenges societal norms and taboos, evoking feelings of revulsion and defiance. Abjection, characterized by its opposition to existing structures, rules, and conventions, is used to explore human behavior and societal dynamics. Bond's plays vividly illustrate this concept through their intense emotional impact, featuring graphic representations of violence, pain, and terror, such as taboo subjects, battered figures, bullet-wounded bodies, brutalized forms, hanging corpses, and decomposing matter. These elements of abjection, according to the article, disrupt societal processes, destabilize legal and social order, and challenge notions of human identity.

In his article, “Endings and Beginnings: Edward Bond and the Shock of Recognition,” John Worthen delves into the intricacies of Edward Bond’s plays, highlighting their depth and significance within Bond’s creative oeuvre. Worthen asserts that Bond’s theatrical approach aims to provoke profound self-awareness and societal reflection in the audience, noting that “In the dynamic relationship between the play and its audience, Bond is wanting our experience of change and understanding to open our own eyes; and he may shock us. But the shock is, finally, the momentary thing... a recognition of ourselves and our society” (Worthen 479). Worthen particularly underscores the complexity of *The Sea*, Bond’s seminal work, emphasizing the playwright’s adept manipulation of time to transcend historical specificity and engage contemporary audiences. The article also highlights how *The Sea*’s depiction of political and military scenarios resonates with current realities, illustrating Bond’s skillful interplay between narrative structure and temporal distortion to reflect and challenge modern issues.

Methods and Methodology

This research employs a focused methodological approach to examine *The Sea* by Edward Bond through the perspective of Arne Naess’ deep ecology. The primary objective is to investigate the play’s movement from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism, with a focus on the notions of biocentric equality and self-realization. The primary approach adopted for this study is qualitative textual analysis. *The Sea* is thoroughly investigated to identify ecological motifs, character dynamics, and narrative structures consistent with Naess’ underlying ecological ideas. This research analyses important discourses, symbols, and events that exemplify or contradict deep ecology’s ideas about biocentric equality and the intrinsic worth of all living forms.

Analysis

The Sea explores the intricate interaction between humans and the natural world, emphasizing the serious repercussions of ecological disturbances. Set in a seaside town, the narrative delves into the ecological and social consequences of human encroachment on nature. The protagonist’s quest to maintain their surroundings exemplifies deep ecology’s central concept of acknowledging the inherent worth of all living creatures. While the play expresses a longing for a peaceful relationship with nature, it also emphasises deep ecology’s ethical responsibility for maintaining the environment, recognising the far-reaching consequences of human activities on ecological systems. This complex literary work provides an excellent foundation for investigating how ecological beliefs impact and shape human-nature relations.

Arne Naess promotes nature’s intrinsic significance and the interconnectedness of the natural world. By identifying the intricate connections and interdependencies within ecosystems, deep ecology supports an ecological worldview that respects and celebrates the diversity of life on this planet. Bond’s *The Sea* delves into the significant theme of nature and its influence on humans. The character of Evens is deeply tied to nature, where he finds peace, consolation, and wisdom. Amid the other characters’ unpleasant and chaotic reality, his connection to the natural world is portrayed as a source of calm and clarity. His relationship to the sea, in particular, is a metaphor for the grandeur and power of nature, in contrast to the limited and repressed aristocratic elite represented by Mrs. Rafi.

The ecological Self has a close connection to the natural environment. It has a strong affinity with it and sees itself as a part of it. Naess position on self: “My relation to this place is

part of myself; If this place is destroyed something in me is destroyed” (Naess 1986, 231). Unlike the Western philosophical tradition, Naess argues that the self is not limited to the body and consciousness, but the ego also helps identify our relationship with nature. Understanding how we ought to live and treat ourselves as individuals who are both self-interested and self-loving is crucial, and it is an area where this text makes a valuable contribution. Self-realization is a critical aspect of deep ecology, which views all living things, including animals and plants, as part of a collective picture. This perspective dismantles the "man-in-environment" paradigm and fosters a more symbiotic connection between all living beings; one that is naturally valued and founded on the enlightened ideal of “equal right to live and blossom” (Naess 1973, 152).

Naess' Self-realization rejects any hierarchical relationship between humans, animals, and plants. Evens' deep relationship with nature is emphasized by his passion for the sea. He lives alone on the beach in a hut isolated from the material world, in harmony with the natural surroundings. He has deep knowledge of the sea and its behavior, demonstrating his sensitivity to natural cycles and patterns “Mrs. Rafi: see Mr Evens. He's peculiar. but he knows the water round here. He'll tell you where anything will come out, and when” (Bond 10). Naess' ecological self creates an individual self-image that is related to the natural environment and the community of all living creatures. Evens represents this idea since he sees himself as an important part of the sea and consequently the natural environment. In his interactions with the natural environment, his understanding of himself amid a broader web of life provides peace and knowledge.

Mrs. Rafi is a personification of shallowness, materialism, and a lack of human compassion. Naess's concept of simple life in deep ecology includes eliminating needless and complex instruments and engaging in activities that have intrinsic meaning. Naess emphasizes a close relationship with nature while rejecting all worldly pursuits. Evens, on the other hand, represents this idea by living in a little cottage on the beach and is closely connected to nature. Mrs. Rafi's confident and materialistic demeanor contradicts simple living ideas. Her way of life involves excessive consumerism, which has a negative impact on the environment. She is unconcerned about sustainability and represents the superficial desire for material status, which violates the ideas of simplicity, sustainability, and equality.

Mrs. Rafi's expensive goods and lifestyle contradict the concepts of self-sufficiency and simplicity. She says to Hatch: “Your catalogue is full of interesting items but none of them are in your shop. You offer only shoddy! How can you affect a discriminating and rewarding class of client?” (Bond 6) Her contempt for the need for thoughtful consumerism and environmental responsibility reflects her preoccupation with outward looks and social position. Furthermore, Mrs. Rafi's preference for imported products and services demonstrates contempt for localism and support for local businesses. It contradicts the idea of assisting and participating with the local community, both of which lead to long-distance transit and greater environmental effect. The unpredictable and destructive qualities of nature are underscored through Colin's drowning and the stormy sea. The depiction does not dismiss the value of deep ecology; rather, it emphasizes the understanding of nature, including both nurturing and destructive forces. Deep ecological philosophy never denies the presence of disaster or the possibility of tragedy in the natural world but rather promotes an awareness of the connectivity and interdependence of every natural phenomenon.

Obsessed with the idea of extraterrestrial invasions and dominance, Hatch sees Willy as a vital player in this imagined danger. Hatch devises a plan to spy on Willy and Evens, and forms a group to carry it out. His paranoia culminates in a violent outburst when he erroneously strikes the

corpse of a deceased man, believing it to be Willy napping on the beach. Hatch represents the devastating effects of an anthropocentric worldview, in which human fears and wants are projected onto the natural environment. His early preoccupation on discovering the truth indicates an anthropocentric craving for control and dominance, fueled by his conviction in human superiority over other forms of life. However, as Hatch's mental state deteriorates, it becomes evident that his anthropocentric beliefs are insufficient for dealing with the intricacies of existence. His journey into madness exemplifies the limitations of seeing the world only through a human-centered lens, in which nature is viewed as something to fear or control. The mayhem that follows Hatch wherever he goes demonstrates the hazards of an anthropocentric perspective: "Mrs Rafi: (making an announcement). Ladies, attention. I think I may say that everything was going very well today until Mr. Hatch came on with his lunacy. Our behaviour was, as usual, an example to the town" (Bond 248). Through Hatch's journey, the play criticises the anthropocentric perspective and its failure to deliver meaningful answers to life's difficulties, emphasising the necessity for a more balanced and ecocentric approach to human connection with nature.

In deep ecology, the notion of self-realization is critical in comprehending and managing environmental challenges. Naess emphasizes the ultimate norm of deep ecology as self-realization, which includes embodying the dictum everything is interrelated. This concept underscores the need for humans to understand their role in the larger ecological system and the interconnection and interdependence of all living forms. According to Naess, "By identifying with greater wholes, we partake in the creation and maintenance of this whole" (Naess, 1989, 173). Self-realization does not involve self-centeredness, because the individual self cannot be separated from the larger self and decomposed into a wider self to generate unity and harmony with the natural environment.

Through Hatch's character, *The Sea* represents a lack of self-realization, which is the ultimate cause of his isolation. Hatch accuses Willy of being an extraterrestrial "Hatch: Look at the facts. He lands in the middle of the storm when no one's going to see him. He arranges to meet the devil, Evens, out on the beach. They come from space. Beyond our world" (Bond 148) that perpetuates social isolation and highlights society's inclination to perceive the unknown or strange with distrust. Deep ecology, according to Naess, dissolves the concept of 'man-in environment' and establishes a more symbiotic relationship; a relationship that is intrinsically valuable and based on an enlightened principle of "the equal right to live and blossom" (Naess 1973, 152). Hatch contributes to the disruption in nature shown in the play by failing to realize the interdependence between people and the natural world.

Hatch's failure to overcome his narrowing ego and accept the integrity of the human and non-human worlds is due to a lack of self-realization. According to Naess, "this large comprehensive Self embraces all the life forms on the planet" (Naess 1986, 80). Hatch's mindset hinders him from seeing the deeper repercussions of his activities and the influence they have on the natural environment, and his failure to transcend his self-centered attitude is destructive to his self. "Hatch: This long beach is a stream trickling through God's hands. Their bodies are crunched underfoot like sand... this is the quiet place where the sea monsters breed and play and lie in the sun. (he reaches the body. He falls on it and knifes it in a frenzy) Kill it! Look, water! Water, not blood?" (Bond 226)

The character of Willy in *The Sea* experiences a tremendous shift from a lost individual to self-realization. Willy, like the other characters, is first presented in the play as a destroyed and lost individual. However, as the narrative progresses, Willy sets off on a quest toward self-realization, underscoring the narrative's fundamental theme. Willy's growing understanding of the

interconnectedness and suffering within the natural world is highlighted at a critical moment, “Back up there, out there, when I look up into the sky, there are things dying, bleeding, and groaning” (Bond 264). Willy’s painful realization about the flagrant violations of the principles of biocentric egalitarianism point towards a rupture between humans and the natural world.

Willy makes a poignant decision to accept life's interconnectedness by swimming in the sea where his friend Colin drowned. “Rose: where are you going? Willy: For a swim. Rose: Today? Willy: Yes. Rose: In the sea? Willy: Yes” (Bond 256-258). Willy accepts the duality of nature's nature; while swimming, he accepts both the serene and stormy sides of nature. Despite the sea's tragic history, Willy's determination to confront the sea's dark side leads to his journey of self-realization. When he learns to understand nature as a separate entity having both tranquility and disruption, he becomes more sensitive to the complexity of the natural world.

“Willy: Living things are a growth that stretches across the universe and kills and devours itself” (Bond 264). Willy's self-realization provides him with the strength and readiness to tackle life's obstacles, as well as a deeper respect for nature and a profound sense of calm. Willy's newfound perspective as a result of self-realization corresponds to Naess' argument that it leads to beautiful acts. He understands his place in the natural chain, which motivates his actions rather than a moral obligation.

According to Naess, “We need 'inclination' rather than morality to acquire T3, which is a pleasant inclination towards nature” (Naess 1989, 86). He says all life forms on Earth have intrinsic value that is independent of their benefit to humans. Naess believes that other creatures and plants have the same desire to realize their “inherent potentialities. We can only recognize them by identification” (Naess 1986, 229). Willy's approach emphasizes the significance of honoring all living beings, which transcends the anthropocentric worldview. It alludes to the rejection of human superiority over other species and focuses on the harmonious coexistence of all living beings by recognizing their intrinsic worth. The play emphasizes the humility and reverence for the natural environment recommended by deep ecology by emphasizing animal thinking over human intellect.

Conclusion

Edward Bond’s *The Sea* offers a profound critique of anthropocentrism and advocates for a transition to ecocentrism by exploring the complex and often harmful interactions between humanity and the natural world. Through Arne Naess' deep ecology perspective, *The Sea* condemns anthropocentric viewpoints while presenting a contrasting vision through the character of Evens. Unlike Hatch, whose descent into madness is fueled by a human-centered worldview, Evens embodies a deep, harmonious connection with nature, living in tune with natural cycles such as the tides. As Collins’ guide, Evens helps him reconnect with nature and find a sustainable path forward. By the play's conclusion, Collins, with Evens' guidance, gains a renewed awareness of his place in the world, underscoring the play's central message: true harmony and self-realization are achievable only through an ecocentric worldview that values all living beings equally. Bond contrasts the destructive potential of a human-centered mindset with the promise of a peaceful, sustainable future grounded in fundamental ecological principles, ultimately reinforcing the necessity of embracing an ecocentric perspective to ensure the survival and well-being of both humanity and the environment.

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