

An Ecocritical Reading of *Melo* by Sevim Ak and *The Iron Woman* by Ted Hughes: Exploring Human and Non-human Entanglement

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ABSTRACT: Children's literature, an amazing, captivating and instructive genre of literary texts, mostly written for children today, is an effective tool for raising children's awareness of environmental issues. Children's literature often includes vivid depictions of nature and its beauty, which can inspire love and respect for the environment. However, in recent years, the themes of children's novels have also diversified and included human impact on environmental pollution, such as global warming, ocean acidification, mass extinction, biodiversity loss and ecological crises. Moreover, the novels' protagonists begin to play the roles of active participants in environmental crises rather than passive observers. Similarly, the protagonists in *Melo* (2018), a realist novel, by Sevim Ak and *The Iron Woman* (2005), a science fiction novel, by Ted Hughes act as conscious citizens and environmental stewards. This paper explores both novels from an ecocritical perspective by exploring the entangled relations between human and non-human beings. Both authors' ecocritical perspective delves into the entangled nature between humans and the non-humans, highlighting the significance of environmental consciousness. The story of *Melo* follows the transformative journey of an eight-year-old girl who progresses from a state of timidity, fragility and insecurity to one of self-assurance. She finds solace in befriending a fish named Pıtır, as she believes animals are more sensitive to her emotions than humans. On the other hand, *The Iron Woman* (1993), serving as a sequel and companion to *The Iron Man* (1968) by Ted Hughes, narrates Iron Woman's pursuit of ecological revenge, as she transforms men over eighteen into animals as a consequence of their pollution of the seas, lakes, and rivers. The protagonist, Lucy, a young girl, endeavors to thwart the ecological threat by raising awareness among the populace. Unquestionably, the two novels depict the entangled relationships between humans and non-humans. Thus, this paper explores how both novels address the issues of environmental pollution and the loss of biodiversity in the seas or rivers. This paper also argues that the characters in both novels pass through the maturation process and reach an «ecological self», growing their self-

identities and identifying themselves with the other beings, either living or non-living. In both novels, the entangled relations between humans and non-humans narrate that there is no hierarchy among the different types of species and that each contributes uniquely to maintaining the planet. Both novels challenge readers to shift their perceptions from an anthropocentric to a more sustainable approach by raising awareness of ecological crises and instilling a biocentric perspective.

EET/TEE KEYWORDS: Ecocriticism; Entanglement; Biodiversity; Human; Nonhuman; XX-XXI Centuries.

Introduction

In the 21st century, environmental problems have become one of the most important subjects among politics, scholars, researchers, and scientists. Climate change, global warming, depletion of the ozone layer, deforestation, water and air pollution, extinction of species, wildfires, and loss of biodiversity are some of the most life-threatening environmental issues facing us today. These issues have exposed numerous environmental crises worldwide, and it seems that we, the human, are to take immediate action to prevent further damage to our planet¹. Nearly in the last two decades of the 20th century, Arne Naess, a Norwegian ecologist and environmental philosopher, introduced the concept of *ecosophy* or *deep ecology theory* in 1973. This theoretical framework advocates a more comprehensive approach to environmentalism, emphasizing the necessity of preserving nature for our own benefit and that of the planet. Naess' deep ecology theory posits a fundamental shift in humanity's perception of the world, contending that all living and non-living entities possess inherent rights that should be safeguarded without prioritizing human beings' interests. In contrast, *shallow ecology* endorses environmental conservation primarily to secure a better environment for human beings². However, during the turn of the 21st century, a significant shift occurred in the perception of ecology, which was marked by a transition from *deep ecology* to *dark ecology*. Scholars Timothy Morton³ and Paul Kingsnorth⁴ coined the term *dark ecology* to emphasize the current environmental condition affected by global pollution. They argue that traditional green ecology is no longer adequate in addressing contemporary environmental challenges and issues. According to them, it is of utmost importance to develop a new framework for describing

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.

² A. Naess, *The Deep-Ecological Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects*, in G. Sessions (ed.), *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century*, Boston, Shambhala, 1995, pp. 64-84.

³ T. Morton, Guest column: *Queer Ecology*, «PMLA», vol.125, n. 2, 2010, pp. 273-282.

⁴ P. Kingsnorth, *Confessions of a Recovering Environmentalist and Other Essays*, Minnesota, Graywolf P., 2017.

ecocide, as they question whether it is feasible to find a place on earth that remains unpolluted by humans or socio-cultural practices. They reveal that natural environments without pollution does no longer exist. Furthermore, Yazgünoğlu defines *dark ecology* as a state of interdependence between humans and non-humans, emphasizing «how humans and nonhumans are fundamentally enmeshed in and negatively interdependent with one another with no boundaries between nature and culture»⁵.

In recent years, every form of human and non-human entanglement has been explored from various interdisciplinary perspectives, including philosophy, sociology, psychology, literature, politics, ethics, and technology. The discipline of children's literature, among others, endeavors to captivate the attention of young readers with the ultimate goal of instilling a sense of environmental consciousness and responsibility. Moreover, the primary objective of the works produced on environmental issues is to raise a generation of individuals who are mindful of their impact on the environment and are committed to taking appropriate measures to preserve it. Using engaging and thought-provoking literary works, children's literature attempts to create an awareness of environmental issues among young readers, thereby encouraging them to become responsible and conscientious citizens.

Broadly defined, children's literature is «a special kind of literature with its own distinguishing characteristics»⁶ meant to educate and entertain children, including on environmental issues. According to Dilek Tufekci Can, children's literature is a literary genre «written through internalization specifically for individuals in their childhood» by considering their «mental, emotional, social, and linguistic development» to expose the «talents of the child» and establish «a link between the past, present, and future», yet, it is also «functional both in protecting cultural heritage and transferring it to younger generations» and «purposeful and interdisciplinary as it contains the values of the age»; while doing these, it contributes to the «formation of a strong sense of aesthetics by creating awareness»⁷, particularly on environmental issues. In contemporary times, there has been a notable correlation between environmental concerns and children's literature. Therefore, an increasing number of authors and publishers seek to address environmental issues in their literary works for young readers. Thus, examining the literary works of children literature on environmental issues has also been the focus of ecocritical readings.

⁵ K.C. Yazgünoğlu, *The Postecological World of John Burnside: Dark Green Nature, Pollution, and Eco-Grief in Glister*, «Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Dergisi», vol. 59, n. 1, 2019, pp. 41-69.

⁶ P. Nodelman, *Beyond Genre and Beyond*, «Children's Literature Association Quarterly», vol. 6, n. 1, 1982, pp. 22-24.

⁷ D. Tüfekçi Can, *Çocuk edebiyatı: kuramsal yaklaşım* [Children literature: theoretical approach], Konya, Eğitim Yayınevi, 2014.

Ecocriticism⁸, defined as an interdisciplinary field that examines «how the natural world is portrayed in literature, typically in relation to modern environmental concerns» in the Oxford English Dictionary, was first introduced by Cheryll Glotfelty, a professor of literature and environment in her work *Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis* (1996). Ecocriticism, simply put, is «the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment»⁹. According to Bonnie Costello, ecocriticism involves «real-world concerns in that it reveals the entanglement of nature and culture, the interplay between our desires, our concepts, and our perceptions, and possibilities for renewal and vitality within that entanglement»¹⁰. Since this paper attempts to explore the entangled relations between human and non-human beings in *Melo* (2018) by Sevim Ak and *The Iron Woman* (2005) by Ted Hughes¹¹, from this part onwards both novels are examined from an ecocritical perspective.

1. *Exploring Human and Non-human Entanglement in Melo by Sevim Ak and The Iron Woman by Ted Hughes*

In her novel *Melo* (2018), Sevim Ak¹² explores the ecological challenges of our modern world. The story commences with a depiction of Sea Field Street, a road that intersects the sea: «When the sea was full of fish, the friendship

⁸ Ecocriticism, originated from the recognition of the environmental crisis in the 1960s and 1970s, argues that we need to shift our focus from the central to the peripheral spheres in order to reduce humankind's impact on nature. This literary theory aims to explore the relationship between humans and nature by examining how nature is depicted in literary works. The theory emphasizes major ecological issues, such as deforestation, species extinction, pollution of rivers, lakes, and seas, and the exploitation of natural resources, to help us understand how nature is portrayed in literature.

⁹ C. Glotfelty, *Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis*, in C. Glotfelty, H. Fromm (edd.), *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (pp. XV-XXXVII), Athens, Georgia, University of Georgia Press, 1996.

¹⁰ B. Costello, *Shifting Ground: Reinventing Landscape in Modern American Poetry*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2003.

¹¹ Ted Hughes as an active proponent of clean water in Southwest England, founded the Torridge Action Group and established Westcountry Rivers Trust in 1993. This underscores his profound interest in water supply and freshwater resources on a global scale.

¹² Sevim Ak (1955-), one of the most prolific authors of Turkish children's literature, has written more than forty children's books in Turkish. Her books are also translated and published in some countries, such as Albania, Bulgaria, Germany, Korea, and the Netherlands. Her first book, *My Kite Is a Cloud Now* (2019), won the Academy Bookstore Short Story Award. Her book, *Broken Umbrella* (2006), was chosen as the best illustrated story book by the Children and Youth Publications Association in 2006. She received nominations for two major prizes that are regarded as the Nobel Prize of children's literature: the Astrid Lindgren Award in 2009 and the Hans Christian Andersen Award in 2012.

of fish and children became the subject of storytellers. Children used to run downhill in the morning to wash their faces with seawater. Because they reckoned starting the day with fish kisses as good luck»¹³. The emphasis on when the sea was teeming with fish, children would run down the hill in the morning to wash their faces with seawater, believing that starting the day with a fish kiss brought good luck implies that this is a reminiscence only in the past, not in the present, and presumably will not be in the future. The narrator highlights the entangled relations between human and non-human as a starting point, by emphasizing the role of a non-human, namely fish in imparting good fortune in the past.

The novel introduces child readers two sisters, Sim and Zülüş as adults, who have never left the neighbourhood where they were born. In the past, as children, they would admire the sea creatures and their playful songs in the blue waters: Both «watched with passion the recreation of sea creatures in the blue water of the sea and their jumping with songs»¹⁴. For instance, in the past, «The sole fish named Poçi would come to shore early in the morning to listen to Sim's night dreams. The girl eagerly awaited the rainbow-colored, tiny, glassy stones it would leave in her palm. With their salt and smell, these stones, best described the places where Poçi wandered»¹⁵. This quote highlights the interdependent relationship that exists between human beings and the natural world, encompassing non-human entities like Poçi, a fish, and stones. Through the perspectives of ecocriticism, David Bohm supports the idea that even the smallest particles in the world are all related to the whole from which they originate¹⁶. This holistic approach emphasizes the interdependent relations between human and non-human beings, including non-living entities such as stones. The narrator encourages child readers to understand that all entities in the universe are equally significant as they are all agents of the whole, inviting them to adopt post-humanistic approaches rather than anthropocentric ones.

In the novel *Melo*, Melo, as an 8-year-old girl, is presented with scraggy legs, a slight belly, wide greenish eyes, brown hair with broom hair, and brown skin. Melo, as a shy girl, has her weaknesses as well as her strengths. For instance, «She is unable to look out of the second-floor window without feeling dizzy. Her head is spinning like a Ferris wheel. When her teacher calls her name, her hands start to shake simultaneously» and additionally, «[s]he would break records if she stayed for an hour without staining her new shorts. It could be a miracle if she completes half of the hundred-piece puzzle. She could never cook her toast without burning it. She is good at tripping over her

¹³ S. Ak, *Melo*, Istanbul, Can Yayınları, 2018.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ D. Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, London, Routledge, 1980.

shoelaces and falling over»¹⁷. As indicated, she seems rather timid, clumsy, and anxious. In the story, Melo is introduced as «the most untalented child around in the neighbourhood»¹⁸, which could be seen as an intentional effort by the narrator to show child readers that everyone can have weakness. By creating a child that is flawed and imperfect, the narrator wants children to be able to relate to Melo and see her with her weaknesses as a natural part of a human being. However, the narrator struggles with the anthropocentric perspective. The narrator achieves this through the use of humor, presenting Melo's weaknesses in a lighthearted way. The ultimate goal is to make child readers feel more comfortable with both desirable and undesirable situations.

Melo, a member of the second generation of the Fish Field Street family, believes that the stories children hear about plentiful fish in the sea are nothing but fairy tales. Unlike her mother, Zülüş and her aunt Sim, Melo has never seen fish in abundance in the sea. She also imagines that it was many years ago when human and non-human species struggled to keep each other alive. Melo's thoughts raise a question about what would happen if children had never experienced the abundance of sea creatures, the blue color of the sea, or the existence of both living and non-living things in the sea. Paul Kingsnorth argues that our anthropocentric perspective can only be changed if the natural loss is culturally acknowledged and cherished via grieving¹⁹. However, Catrina Mortimer-Sandilas, among many ecocritics, finds this argument unconvincing. She questions how it could be possible for one to grieve in the midst of a society that finds it so difficult to appreciate what has been lost²⁰. In accordance with Mortimer-Sandilas's perspective, I posit that the reminiscences of Melo are not a representation of reality but rather a manifestation of imaginative utterances, just like reminiscent of fairy tales. This is due to the intricacies surrounding Melo's understanding of the extent of the loss she has experienced.

Melo's dreams come true when she sees a fish with a lacy tail. She had never believed that fish existed in the sea until that day. The fish becomes her closest friend, and she names it Pıtır. «She was telling her resentment, incompetence, and frustrations to the cushions in her room, but now, she talks about her worries to Pıtır»²¹. Pıtır becomes a non-human agent for Melo in time. Melo confides her worries to Pıtır, and it brings her much joy to watch the fish make air bubbles on the shore. One day, Pıtır disappears, and Melo is confused. When she asks her aunt Sim where the fish went, she is shocked by the an-

¹⁷ Ak, *Melo*, cit., p.15.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹⁹ Kingsnorth, *Confessions of a Recovering Environmentalist and Other Essays*, cit.

²⁰ C. Mortimer-Sandilands, *Melancholy Natures, Queer Ecologies*, in C. Mortimer-Sandilands, B. Erickson (edd.), *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, Bloomington, Indiana UP, 2010, pp. 331-358.

²¹ Ak, *Melo*, cit., p. 14.

swer: «Those more powerful than you can sometimes take all you have from your hands without letting you notice. What is a fish?»²². The narrator of the novel has effectively integrated the ecological threat into the plot of the story, thereby lending significance to the aunt's ideological response in the upcoming pages of the novel.

In the novel, «Melo was gently explaining what she hadn't told anyone, but only to Pıtır»²³. She rushes to the beach wearing her red shorts, hoping to catch a glimpse of Pıtır. She patiently waits for it to surface, knowing that «Pıtır has always been cheerful, friendly, and joyful. It never criticizes her, as if it accepts her weaknesses and fears as they are»²⁴. The relationship between human-animal and animal is presented in this part of the novel through the lens of a narrator whose main purpose is to make two species existence more tolerable and acceptable, and occasional. Iovino and Oppermann narrates the entangled relations between species with these words: «Whether visible or invisible, socialized or wild», undeniably, «all material forms emerging in combination with forces, agencies, and other matter», in one way or another, «[e]ntangled in endless ways [...]»²⁵.

At the beginning of the novel, the author's creating an attention-grabbing character named Melo, who is introduced along with her friend Pıtır metaphorically symbolizes the human and non-human entanglement. Despite Melo's belief that she is the clumsiest child among her friends, she possesses a curious and imaginative nature. In the novel, Melo encounters three friends one morning who she labels as an «annoying trio». The children want to participate in a music competition, but unfortunately, they don't have any musical instruments except for a harmonica. However, the children come up with a brilliant idea and decide to collect materials that make sounds from the environment. They find piles of stuff behind the garden wall like «[k]ids bike with broken handlebars, clothes dryer wire, gymnastics elastics, suction cup, reel box ... what you are looking for was there»²⁶. As they dive from the pier into the sea with their goggles, they discover that «the bottom of the sea is full of garbage. Dirt, mold ... full»²⁷. Only then does one of the children named Fırto understand «why there is no story about Fish Field»²⁸. Another boy named Kuzi shares that «Recently, an old man stopped me by hooking his cane to my feet. He asked why the sea was not green. I thought he was color-blind at first. However, then I went down to the beach and looked. Indeed,

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ S. Iovino, S. Oppermann, *Introduction: Stories Come to Matter*, in Idd. (edd.), *Material Ecocriticism*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2014, pp. 1-17.

²⁶ Ak, *Melo*, cit., p. 71.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

it was green»²⁹. These are the first signs of awareness about the sea among the children. Although human-made problems are becoming increasingly visible, people are often too overwhelmed with their own troubles to notice the changes in the environment around them.

Melo occasionally visits the seaside to see Pıtır. However, she fails to notice that the color of the sea is gradually turning greenish. Melo is curious about the sea and wonders if the sea has a consciousness of its own, just like humans. She ponders over its ability to think, speak, and hold both goodness and evil. She pronounces, «The sea is like us. It thinks, it speaks, and it keeps both goodness and evil»³⁰. While at the beach, she comes across a banner that states the time it takes for certain objects to decompose in the sea. It reads: «Tin takes 100 years, plastic bottles take 450 years, and glass disappears in 1 million years»³¹. As she reminisces, she recalls that fishermen would dive into the sea and exhibit their catches from the deep waters. She says, «Whatever you want is there. A sofa set, refrigerator, television, rug, basket...»³². It dawns on her that if the written records are accurate, there may be a vast dumping ground in the deep sea. Plumwood argues, «we need a deep and comprehensive restructuring of culture that rethinks and reworks human locations and relations to nature all the way down. Reason can certainly play a role in this thinking»³³. Undeniably, Plumwood contends that humans need a new ethic to restore harmony in nature, abandoning their anthropocentric inclinations. In doing so, humankind can strive towards a more sustainable and equitable world, one that is less focused on fulfilling their self-interests and more centered on the flourishing of all life forms.

As Melo strolls along the beach, she tries to clear her mind and escape from her troubling thoughts. She realizes that she has always been criticized for everything she does. Even when she is solving a puzzle with only three pieces, people around her tell her to be faster and quicker «Come on, be fast, be quick, and be quicker...»³⁴, which makes her feel uncomfortable. Her mother tells her, «Do not swing... Hasn't it finished yet?» while her father warns her, «You better bring something without breaking it», and then, her aunt cries, «Don't look at the clouds, keep your head up»³⁵. Melo cannot understand why the adults seem to have a problem with her giving correct answers, even if she takes longer to do so.

Despite her troubles, she cannot discuss them with Pıtır as it has disap-

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, p. 77.

³³ V. Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crises of Reason*, London & New York, Routledge, 2002, p. 8.

³⁴ Ak, *Melo*, cit., p. 88.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

peared. Melo soon realizes that the sea is boiling and emitting a terrible smell. She sits down on a large, blackish stone and feels the stench in the air once again: «The stench was overwhelming; it was causing unhappiness [...]. The surface of the water was covered with a thick dark green moss. The stench was wafting from a stump in giant gray bubbles», and then, «Melo realized she was hardly breathing; she was scared; her throat was burning; she couldn't help coughing. 'What if I get poisoned and I am stuck here?' she thought»³⁶. This quotation highlights the harm humans are causing to the ecosystem through waste and pollution. Accordingly, Serpil Opperman asserts the idea that every living and non-living entity in nature is interconnected to each other to form a wholeness or order in nature, so even the smallest damage can lead to significant ecological problems³⁷. In this regard, ecocriticism by deconstructing the anthropocentric perspectives, suggests equal treatment for all living entities.

In one part of the story, Melo quickly returns to tell her friends about something important she has seen in the sea. It is only Miro, an older boy from the neighborhood, who shows an interest in the ecosystem and understands the significance of preserving it. George Sessions explicitly defines the concept self-realisation: «...human individuals attain personal Self-realisation, and psychological/emotional maturity when they progress from an identification with narrow ego, through identification with other humans, to a more all-encompassing identification of their 'self' with nonhuman individuals, species, ecosystems and with ecosphere itself»³⁸. In this novel, the pollution of the sea is not taken seriously by Melo's friends, but only Melo and Miro identify themselves with the species and ecosphere. The fact that Melo's friends do not seem to understand the significance of the pollution in the sea suggests that they are still at the stage of a narrow ego. This narrow ego stage is characterized by a focus on individual needs and desires, without considering the impact on the environment or other living or non-living beings. Melo and Miro's attitudes highlight the importance of progressing from a narrow ego to a more inclusive identification with non-human individuals, species, ecosystems, and the ecosphere itself.

In the following excerpt, Melo discusses with her friends the issue of sea pollution and shares her concerns about the impact it may have on marine life. «I have found a stump that emits a stench that you could never imagine. I have had a fish named Pıtır. I have been wondering whether the gases and the bubbles poisoned her. She does not appear for days. I have been thinking

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

³⁷ S. Oppermann, *Ekoeleştirir: Çevre ve edebiyat çalışmalarının dünü ve bugünü*, in Ead. (ed.), *Ekoeleştirir çevre ve Edebiyat*, Ankara, Phoenix, 2012, pp. 9-57.

³⁸ G. Sessions, *Arne Naess on Deep Ecology*, in G. Sessions, *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century*, Boston, Shambhala, 1995, pp. 187-194.

for her»³⁹. At the moment she mentions a fish she owned, named Pıtır, which she fears may have been affected by the pollution, her friend Asu dismisses her concerns, «Pıtır and poison... What does it matter? Fish do not have memories... They swim one day around here and another day around other coasts»⁴⁰. Melo disagrees, arguing that «[t]he memories of fish are better than those of our own. Haven't you heard of migratory fish that return to the bottom of the rock where they lay their eggs?»⁴¹. Through this conversation, the narrator prompts child readers to consider the similarities between humans and animals as far as their memories are concerned.

In the following days, as Melo encounters the annoying trio and Miro on the street, they immediately notice a pungent, heavy, and filthy odor dispersed in the air. «Fırto had a coughing fit. Asu had a stomachache and felt like she was going to vomit. The children, holding their breath, disappeared instantly»⁴². As they move forward, Melo observes that the atmosphere is polluted, and going back home is not going to be easy. Then she realizes, «Not only the air but also the water and soil were poisoned. Grey-black, turbid, foul-smelling water flowed from the streets»⁴³. Melo returns home and inquiries about the happenings in nature. To her surprise, she learns that a textile factory is responsible for the environmental changes in the area. The factory has been pouring toxic waste into the sea, resulting in severe pollution. Despite numerous protests and complaints from the youth in the neighborhood, the factory owner feels no responsibility for the damage caused by their actions. One day, the youth decide to take matters into their own hands and block the end of the pipe through which the toxic waste flows. However, their actions lead to an unexpected turn of events when the factory owner retaliates by opening the gates of the factory and pouring the toxic water onto the streets. Kingsnorth highlights the spiritual and sacred aspect of nature that consumerist societies often overlook and uses terms such as *eco-lament* and *eco-grief* to describe the dark ecology of the situation⁴⁴. The factory owner's behavior is likely driven by capitalism, as his desire for profit overrides his concern for the environment and the community. Regrettably, this is a common occurrence in capitalist societies, where *eco-lament* and *eco-grief* are often ignored due to people's greediness.

Melo's family has realized that they are all so busy with their daily routines that they do not pay attention to the changes happening in the environment around them. Melo now understands the importance of her aunt's words when she said, «Those more powerful than you can sometimes take all you have

³⁹ Ak, *Melo*, cit., p. 92.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Kingsnorth, *Confessions of a Recovering Environmentalist and Other Essays*, cit., p. 98.

from your hands without letting you notice»⁴⁵. However, after Melo's mother declares, «I cannot be only a witness»⁴⁶ and decides to actively protest against the factory. Kingsnorth explains that «Grieving is the starting point for being able to move on and through, and to begin to rebuild yourself again»⁴⁷. This action becomes a story of resistance in which the entire neighborhood plays a vital role in saving nature. People chant slogans such as:

Get your poison off.
 Sea belongs to anybody.
 The fish are gone, the birds are gone, and we're not going anywhere.
 Either clean up the pollution or seal your factory.
 Don't touch our water!
 Don't touch our forest!
 Don't touch our air!⁴⁸

The protesters receive the news that «production at the factory stopped until wastewater treatment plants were installed»⁴⁹ in the evening. However, this decision does not appease the protesters. Since it is important to note that eight years ago, when the factory was established, the workers were exhilarated to have found employment. They had high hopes for the factory and believed it would bring development and progress to the area. Still, what they did not anticipate was the negative impact the factory would have on the environment. Over the years, the factory had been discharging untreated waste into the sea, polluting the water and the air in the surrounding areas. The people were unaware of the severity of the pollution until they were hit by the foul smell which burned their nasal passages. The factory, which was supposed to be a source of progress and development, had caused more harm than good in years. However, the decision to halt production until wastewater treatment plants were installed can be seen as a step in the right direction. However, the people have still been dissatisfied and felt that more needed to be done to address the environmental damage caused by the factory. They hope that the authorities and the factory management will take more concrete actions to restore the environment and ensure that such incidents will not occur in the future.

One of the most fundamental aspects of environmental issues lies in the human questioning process. It is, in fact, a crucial element in addressing the challenges that arise from the impact of human activities on the environment. This process of questioning, which involves a critical examination of the causes and consequences of these issues, is essential to developing a deeper understanding

⁴⁵ Ak, *Melo*, cit., p. 104.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁴⁷ Kingsnorth, *Confessions of a Recovering Environmentalist and Other Essays*, cit., p. 98.

⁴⁸ Ak, *Melo*, cit., p. 105.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

of the problem and to finding effective solutions. In the novel, the people in the neighborhood ask several intriguing questions, such as:

Would they think about where the shoals of fish had gone when only someone asked? While the neighborhood could be alarmed when someone lost their mobile phone, why was it not heard when many sea creatures were destroyed? Who could measure the penalty for pouring poison into the water? How many massacres was it equivalent to that destruction? Wasn't it the culpability of the people who dumped rubble into the sea?⁵⁰

The residents of a particular neighborhood have been facing a significant challenge in the form of cleaning up the sea. However, what is remarkable is the relentless and determined effort put in by these individuals to achieve this goal. Despite facing multiple obstacles, the residents have displayed an unwavering commitment to the cause. This has had a profound impact on the community, leading to an increase in dialogue, empathy, and understanding among the residents. According to Naess, «the higher the levels of Self-realisation attained by any person, the more any further increase depends upon the Self-realisation of others» due to the fact that «[i]ncreased self-identity involves increased identification with others»⁵¹. Naess argues that as an individual's self-identity grows, so does their identification with others. Naess's concept of Self-realization indicates the interrelatedness of all living and non-living organisms and entities on the planet.

In the following days, the people in the neighborhood realize that the sea became more accessible to clean itself because the waste from the factory did not pollute the sea. The bottom of the sea is becoming visible day by day. Melo is thoughtful about her friend's life Pıtır. She will be cheerful when Pıtır arrives and appears in the sea. After a while, she finds that it is Pıtır with its original tail, which seems like a bugle. While Melo is playing her harmonica, Pıtır jumps over the sea's surface, joyfully producing bubbles. The cry of a grandfather with a cane is heard then: «The sea has won. Fish are back»⁵². Within the context of the novel, a festival is depicted in which diverse art forms, including dance, music, cinema, and theater, are displayed in the verdant area of the neighborhood. The festival underscores the interconnectedness of human beings, emphasizing the interdependency of human relationships. Interestingly enough, the sea pollution has brought people together and made them realize who their neighbors are. They have acted and organized collaboratively in the protest, realizing the importance of sea creatures and other non-human beings. They attain full self-realization and accept, «We have closed our doors for fear of damage to property and life. We are trapped in narrow spaces. Now

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁵¹ Naess, *The Deep-Ecological Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects*, cit., pp. 64-84.

⁵² Ak, *Melo*, cit., p. 114.

it is time to go out»⁵³. In her novel, the author, Sevim Ak encourages young readers to recognize the importance of preserving the sea as a means of addressing environmental concerns. Melo demonstrates the power of hope and the potential for positive change.

At the end of the novel, «Melo walked away from the crowd. She stopped near the sea. The fish-smelling wind caressed her face. She took a deep breath and looked at the sky. It was as if a mirror was shining on the farthest star»⁵⁴. Sevim Ak possesses an intense power for creating and establishing environmentally conscious characters in this novel. Ak makes her young readers conscious of the importance of self-confidence, the power of solidarity, the necessity of altruism, and the joy of others. The concept of hope is implicitly or explicitly portrayed in the novel regarding all these issues. It is crucial to raise awareness among child readers regarding the significance of environmental issues and the role that they can play in making a difference.

From this part onwards, the novel *The Iron Woman* (1993) by Ted Hughes⁵⁵ is to be explored within the perspective of ecocritical reading. In *The Iron Woman*, which is a sequel and companion to a science fiction novel named *The Iron Man*⁵⁶ (1968), Hughes narrates human-induced climate change in the context of an environmental crisis. *The Iron Woman* expands the story beyond a critique of warfare and inter-human conflict to express many of Hughes's social and political concerns about pollution and the environment. In *The Iron Woman*, the author's decision to create a hybrid human-machine character may have been intentional, as Nikolajeva notes, «[n]egotiations within the hybrid human-animal or human-machine body are omnipresent in real life, but in fiction they can be amplified, and in children's fiction they can be used for didactic purposes»⁵⁷. Undeniably, the author attempts to express his concerns about nature through a human-machine body like Iron Woman by acknowledging the pedagogical impacts of children's literature. The novel can also be viewed as a potential way of repairing the broken bonds between humanity and nature and, particularly considering the current environmental crisis, as a wake-up call where children can act as environmental stewards.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

⁵⁵ Ted Hughes, by the name of Edward J. Hughes (1930-1998), an English poet who was appointed Britain's poet laureate in 1984, authored several notable children's novels, including *The Iron Man* (1968), *Remains of Elmet* (1979), and *The Iron Woman* (1993). Not only as an author of children's literature but also as a poet, Hughes demonstrated his concerns about ecological issues in his works. Ted Hughes, a nature-loving poet, believes that storytelling could help young readers become more engaged and motivated towards environmental issues.

⁵⁶ *The Iron Man* (1968) is about the story of a giant 'metal man' of unknown origin who unexpectedly arrives in England and wreaks havoc on the countryside by devouring agricultural machinery before befriending a young boy and saving the world from a dragon.

⁵⁷ M. Nikolajeva, *Recent Trends in Children's Literature Research: Return to the Body*, «International Research in Children's Literature», vol. 9, n. 2, 2016, pp. 132-145.

Similar to that of *Melo*, the beginning of *The Iron Woman* raises several intriguing questions about the existence of certain animals in the water. The protagonist, Lucy, crosses over Otterfeast Bridge after school, a name she gave it, and sees a swimming otter below. While watching, she notices «[s]omething deep in the water, something white, kept twisting. A fish? Suddenly she knew. It was an eel – behaving in the strangest way. At first, she thought it must be two eels, fighting. But no, it was just one eel» and, she suspiciously observes, «It knotted itself and unknotted. Then it swam quickly round in circles, corkscrewing over and over as it went. At one point, its tail flipped right out of the water. Then it was writhing down into the mud, setting a grey cloud drifting», and last of all, she realizes, «it was up at the surface again, bobbing its head into the air. She saw its beaky face, then its little mouth opening. She saw the pale inside of its mouth»⁵⁸. Through this narration, the narrator implies the effects of chemicals and decline of species, expressing his concerns about the pollution of rivers, lakes, and seas at the very start of the novel.

With the emergence of a mysterious giant Iron Woman from a polluted marsh, Lucy tries to understand what it is from the shape of this amorphous figure. She first mistakes the «man-shaped statue of black mud» for «a hippopotamus-headed, gigantic dinosaur, dragging itself on all fours up out of a prehistoric tar pit»⁵⁹. She then mistakes the Iron Woman for a «seal covered with black, shiny oil. A seal that had swum through an oil slick»⁶⁰. After a while, she understands that « [...] all at once it looked human – immense but human [...]. A truly colossal, man-shaped statue of black mud, raking itself and groaning, towered over the lonely marsh»⁶¹. The polluted marsh where the Iron Woman first appears is a reminder of Morton's dark ecology, which explores the interrelations between *the mesh* and *the strange stranger*. These strange strangers are entities that exist in interconnectedness, with nothing being entirely itself. The amorphous appearance of the Iron Woman from the marsh evokes a sense of otherworldliness that may be beyond the comprehension of young readers at first sight. Strange strangers are either humans or nonhumans, but they can also be ghosts, vampires, and giants. Morton explains the interrelations between the mesh and the strange strangers with these words: «Each entity in the mesh looks strange. Nothing exists all by itself, and so nothing is fully 'itself'»⁶². By introducing the concept of strange strangers through the character of Iron Woman, the author invites young readers to think about the interconnectedness of all things in the world. This encourages

⁵⁸ T. Hughes, *The Iron Woman*, New York, USA, Dial Books, [with engravings by Barry Moser], 1995.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁶² T. Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, Massachusetts, Harvard UP., 2010.

them to develop a deeper understanding for the complex and intricate relationships within an entangled natural world.

The encounter between Lucy and Iron Woman marks a crucial point in the ontological association between humans and non-humans. To become equal ecosystem members, Oppermann suggests that humans must eliminate the boundaries between humans and non-humans⁶³. This explanation emphasizes the importance of all participants in nature working together, including biotic and abiotic entities. The only way to break the so-called hierarchical order among species seems to break the boundaries between humans and non-humans.

In the novel, Lucy takes the Iron Woman to the canal to wash, but she finds it «almost empty of water». Similar to that of the sea in *Melo*, in *The Iron Woman*, the canal has become a garbage dump full of various discarded items, such as «rusty bicycle wheels, supermarket trolleys, bedsteads, prams, old refrigerators, washing machines, car batteries, even two or three old cars, along with hundreds of rusty, twisted odds and ends, tangles of wire, cans and bottles and plastic bags»⁶⁴. This quotation emphasizes the unavoidable negative impact of industrialization on nature. Through the lens of ecocritical consideration, Paul Kingsnorth describes how industrialization damages human relationships with nature. He writes, «Our civilization is beginning to break down. We are at the start of an unfolding economic and social collapse which may take decades or centuries to play out – and which is playing out against the background of a planetary ecocide that nobody seems able to prevent»⁶⁵. Through the novel, the narrator aims to reveal that the canal, which should be full of water, is now empty and filled with man-made pollutants, emphasizing the destructive impact of industrialization on the environment due to the man-made existence of these pollutants in the canal.

Throughout the novel, Iron Woman gradually transforms into a resolute woman, driven to halt the practice of the factory disposing waste into the river. Her journey towards activism is a central theme of the book, and her unwavering commitment to her cause is a testament to her determined nature. Iron Woman orders Lucy to clean her quickly, saying «Waste no time» and «Hurry!»⁶⁶, and adding, «More water»⁶⁷. When Lucy asks if Iron Woman is a robot, she responds that she is not, stating «I am the real thing»⁶⁸ and introducing herself as Iron Woman. The novel's storytelling style involves «a

⁶³ S. Oppermann, *Ecocriticism: Natural World in the Literary Viewfinder*, «Hacettepe Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi», vol. 16, n. 2, 1999, pp. 29-46.

⁶⁴ Hughes, *The Iron Woman*, cit., p. 26.

⁶⁵ Kingsnorth, *Confessions of a Recovering Environmentalist and Other Essays*, cit., p. 142.

⁶⁶ Hughes, *The Iron Woman*, cit., p. 24.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

chain of supernatural event», making the novel into «a somewhat surreal cybernetic fantasy»⁶⁹.

Iron Woman's befriending Lucy leads her narrate how difficult position she is in. Her situation is narrated as, «And even though her own eyes were wide open that horrible mass of screams, yells, wails, groans came hurtling closer and closer, louder and louder – till she knew that in the next moment it would hit her like that express train and sweep her away»⁷⁰. When Iron Woman tells Lucy that she hears the screams and cries of the different creatures all the time, Lucy is deeply affected. Morton emphasizes the interconnectedness all living and non-living entities using the words: «Interconnection implies separateness and difference. There would be no mesh if there were no strange strangers. The mesh isn't a background against which the strange stranger appears. It is the entanglement of all strangers»⁷¹. The entanglement between human and non-human, including animals indicates the *sine qua non* of all strangers.

In the novel, the narrator emphasizes that the voice heard is coming from the marsh; indeed, «It is the cry of the insects, the leeches, the worms, the shrimps, the water skeeters, the beetles, the bream, the perch, the carp, the pike, the eels»⁷². By giving animals human-like characteristics, the narrator wants to convey that animals can also cry like humans when they are exposed to a life-threatening situation. The animals suffer just like humans. In a scene where Lucy observes the sea species at the river, she has had a shocking experience. She feels that the sea species are trying to give her a message this time. Morton describes the encounter of humans with other beings, such as animals, as follows: «Our encounter with other beings becomes profound. They are strange, even intrinsically strange. Getting to know them makes them stranger. When we talk about life forms, we're talking about *strange strangers*»⁷³. This perspective highlights the importance of recognizing and appreciating the diversity of life on the planet.

The agonizing conditions of the life forms in the river are presented through Lucy's eyes. She observes, «[t]he river rolled and swirled [...]. It was the eek again. She heard a crying, and knew it was the eel. And there were words in the crying. She could almost make them out, but not quite», and also perceives that «the carp was also crying. It seemed to be shouting, or rather yelling, the same thing over and over. Lucy could not make out the words»⁷⁴. In a moment, she witnesses the cry of several animals: «Just like the others, the otter came twisting and tumbling towards them, up the fiery tunnel, in a writhing

⁶⁹ L. Kerslake, *Reading The Iron Woman in Times of Crisis as a Tale of Hope*, «Children's Literature in Education», vol. 53, n. 4, 2022, pp. 439-453.

⁷⁰ Hughes, *The Iron Woman*, cit., p. 29.

⁷¹ T. Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, Massachusetts, Harvard UP., 2010.

⁷² Hughes, *The Iron Woman*, cit., p. 30.

⁷³ Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, cit.

⁷⁴ Hughes, *The Iron Woman*, cit., p. 31.

sort of dance, as if it were trying to escape from itself. And as it came it was crying something, just like the eel and the barbel»⁷⁵. Then, a kingfisher comes «This dazzling little bird came whirling and crying till it fluttered itself into a blaze of smoke like a firework spinning on a nail»⁷⁶. Then a frog appears: «[I]ts voice came loud and clear, a wailing cry like the same words shouted again and again»⁷⁷. The last time was a shocking experience for her. «It was a human baby. It looked like a fat pink newt, jerking and flailing inside a fiery bubble [...]. This time, the crying was not like words. It was simply crying – the wailing, desperate cry of a human baby when it cries as if the world had ended»⁷⁸. These various quotes suggest that all forms of life are at risk of extinction because of the anthropocentric belief that humans are «the measure of all things»⁷⁹. This belief is based on the idea that humans are the only and most important beings on the planet because of their thinking abilities.

As mentioned in the previous quotes, it has been revealed that many of the species living in the river are on the verge of extinction. Christopher Manes points out, «If fungus, one of the ‘lowliest’ of forms on a humanistic scale of values, were to go extinct tomorrow, the effect on the rest of the biosphere would be catastrophic; in contrast, if *Homo sapiens* disappeared, the event would go virtually unnoticed by the vast majority of Earth’s life»⁸⁰. Manes posits that the extinction of fungus, which appears insignificant in the humanistic scale of values, would have catastrophic consequences on the rest of the biosphere. Conversely, his explanation on the disappearance of *Homo sapiens* would barely register with the vast majority of Earth’s life is a thought-provoking one. The statement highlights a crucial point that humans often overlook – their position at the top of the hierarchy is a mistake, and it is not justified by nature. Although humans are an integral part of the natural world, the non-existence of humans is not felt in nature, which existed long before humankind. The natural world has its own order, and each species plays a unique role in maintaining the balance. However, the literary work in question depicts a dire situation for the various species inhabiting the river, owing to the deleterious effects of artificial pollution.

In the forthcoming parts of the novel, the young readers better understand the factory as a source of pollution. Through an ecocritical perspective, the narrator highlights the adverse effects of anthropocentrism on nature. This viewpoint emphasizes that prioritizing human needs over the environment’s

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ R. Braidotti, *Posthuman Feminist Theory*, in L. Disch, M. Hawkesworth (edd.), *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, Oxford Handbooks, Oxford, Oxford UP.

⁸⁰ C. Manes, *Nature and Silence*, ed. by C. Glotfelty and H. Fromm, *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, Athens, Georgia UP, 1996, pp. 15-29.

wellbeing will hinder any progress in improving its state. Kingsnorth writes, «We are not gods, and our machines will not get us off this hook, however clever they are and however much we would like to believe it»⁸¹. This explanation highlights his concerns about the close connection between industrialization and the harm done to humanity and, thus, the planet itself. Specifically, he suggests that we cannot simply rely on technological advancements to save us from the consequences of our actions.

Additionally, the narrator highlights the link between capitalism and pollution. For instance, in the novel, the factory workers receive higher wages as the waste production doubles, leading to increased productivity. This example illustrates the inextricable relationship between capitalism and pollution: «Everybody worked at the Waste Factory. Only the month before, the Waste Factory had doubled its size. It was importing waste now from all over the world. It was booming. Her [Lucy's] father had just had another rise in wages»⁸². Nevertheless, a careful examination of the situation reveals that the Waste Factory's operations have significant environmental and social costs, despite the apparent economic benefits.

The novel unveils that Lucy is approached by Iron Woman, who purports to be present to impart a lesson to the human race. While delivering her message, Iron Woman is seen dancing and singing, although her voice is unpleasant. Her utterances are so loud that they appear to be a combination of roaring and groaning:

DESTROY THE POISONERS.
THE IGNORANT ONES.
DESTROY THE POISONERS.
THE IGNORANT ONES.
THE SPOILERS
DESTROY.
THE SPOILERS
DESTROY⁸³

Iron Woman's statements can be comprehended through the concept of *implicate order* meaning, unbroken movements of electromagnetic waves, proposed by American physicist David Bohm in his work *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* (1980). Bohm's theory postulates that the universe as an uninterrupted continuum of all existence namely, a continuous, undivided, and flowing movement without borders. To him, the electromagnetic waves conveyed by the *holomovement* [everything is in a state of process] have always

⁸¹ Kingsnorth, *Confessions of a Recovering Environmentalist and Other Essays*, cit., p. 142.

⁸² Hughes, *The Iron Woman*, cit., p. 36.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

been in constant motion⁸⁴, being in a perpetual state of process, constantly evolving and moving. According to Bohm, our current problems arise from trying to perceive the world as separate pieces, rather than as a continuous and undivided whole. The literary work under consideration brings to light the fact that Iron Woman's ire is not limited to the environmental contamination of a particular district, but also encompasses the deleterious effects of such contamination on the global scale.

In the novel, Lucy speculates that Iron Woman's anger is due to the Waste Factory, which concerns people because it pollutes everything. Lucy asserts that, «She'll trample the whole thing flat. Nothing can stop her»⁸⁵. Lucy seeks help from Iron Man and his friend Hogarth, a little boy, to stop the pollution caused by a nearby factory. She discovers that Iron Woman plans to turn all male workers at the factory into fish, so they can suffer the same fate as the aquatic creatures living in the polluted river. Lucy and Hogarth decide to take action and go directly to the factory to warn the owner of the impending destruction if he does not take action. Lucy makes it clear that the factory's toxic waste is poisoning the river, killing all the fish and other creatures that rely on it, as well as damaging the surrounding marshland. It is seen that both Lucy and Hogarth go through the process of maturity. Naess outlines the process of self-maturation as involving three distinct stages: «from ego to social self (compromising the ego) and from social self to a metaphysical self (compromising the social self)» and finally, to «the ecological self», namely, «the identification of [the self] with nonhuman living beings»⁸⁶. The entreaties of both Lucy and Hogarth to the factory owner to assume accountability and take appropriate action to preclude pollution before it reaches an irreparable level evince their adoption of the ecological self. Specifically, they have identified with non-human living entities, or more specifically, the river species. Despite Lucy's warnings, as such, «Your factory has poisoned the river. It's killed all the fish. It's poisoning all the creatures. It's poisoning the marsh. You have to stop it. Today. Now»⁸⁷, the factory owner seems disinterested in the plight of the river and its inhabitants, failing to acknowledge the severity of the pollution.

In the factory, the manager J. Wells's office has become the site of some truly strange occurrences. When Lucy and Hogarth are forced to leave the office, «[...] whoever touched either Lucy or Hogarth ha[ve] to deal with the blast of cries – the roar of screams and groans, [...] and the tortured cries of the creatures were colliding in the middle of their brains»⁸⁸. Despite the chaos,

⁸⁴ Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, cit., p. 151.

⁸⁵ Hughes, *The Iron Woman*, cit., p. 36.

⁸⁶ Naess, *Self-Realisation: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World*, cit., p. 226.

⁸⁷ Hughes, *The Iron Woman*, cit., p. 56.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

nobody knows where these screams are coming from, or why they are happening. Lucy shouts, «Now you know what it's like. That noise is the creatures screaming with your poison. Now you'll never get away from it»⁸⁹. What is even more disturbing is that the screams seem to be contagious: «None of them could escape the fact that when they touched each other both were stunned by the screams. It was as if they had all become high-voltage scream batteries»⁹⁰. At the factory, Lucy and Hogarth have the ability to transmit the strange screams to anyone who comes into contact with them. This seemingly unrealistic scene in the novel can be interpreted as a consequence of humans' improper and inequitable attitudes towards non-human entities, which ultimately lead to damage to nature. Serpil Oppermann has also criticized humans for treating nature as separate and exploiting it, resulting in its degradation⁹¹. In the novel, specifically, inadequate treatment of non-human beings can be considered the root of the contagious screaming. This observation highlights the significance of ethical treatment of non-human entities and the need for more equitable interactions between humans and non-human entities.

Within the context of the novel, subsequent to the outbreak of contagious screaming among the touchers, the journalist conducts an interview with both children in close proximity to the factory. The purpose of the interview is ostensibly to obtain firsthand knowledge regarding the origin and ramifications of the peculiar phenomenon that has been rapidly disseminating at the factory. Although it remains unclear whether the children are directly or indirectly impacted by the screaming, the journalist is resolute in uncovering the underlying causes of the event in order to provide a comprehensive report on its implications for the community. However, it is believed that everything started with Lucy, and she is thought to have abnormal powers. Yet, within the context of the novel, it is apparent that anthropocentric attitudes and «[t]his way of life has brought about pollution, destruction of the balance of nature, overpopulation, worldwide economic and political disorder, and the creation of an overall environment that is neither physically nor mentally healthy for most of the people who have to live within it»⁹². Undeniably, it is discernible that the planet itself is in danger of becoming extinct due to overexposure to natural resources.

The next day, Lucy, Hogarth, Iron Woman, and Iron Man meet and discuss whether making the people hear the screams of the animals will bring about change. In the novel, Iron Woman is described as «a giant scream-transmitter»⁹³ who believes that screaming alone will not bring change. She

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Oppermann, *Ecocriticism: Natural World in the Literary Viewfinder*, cit., p. 31.

⁹² Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, cit., p. 2.

⁹³ Hughes, *The Iron Woman*, cit., p. 66.

thinks that «something more» is needed⁹⁴. The four characters in the story agree that destroying those who are responsible for the extinction of the creatures is not the solution. Then, Iron Woman's body begins to vibrate, and her body becomes a blur of vibration for a minute. The blurred mass of the Iron Woman grows more extensive because of the whirling and the roar. When her shape reappears, it is seen that she has doubled in size. The Iron Man tells the Iron Woman that «now you have all the power of the Space-Bat-Angel-Dragon, my mighty slave from the depths of the universe. It has packed itself inside you. It has become your power»⁹⁵. The Iron Man tells her that she can do anything she wants because her power is almost infinite. However, Lucy becomes anxious as she realizes how cruel the Iron Woman's revenge can be: «Lucy was thinking of her father, she was suddenly afraid of what the Iron Woman might do to him, along with his workmates. The Iron Woman looked down at her. Instead of black, or red, her eyes were now deep, dark, fiery blue. And all her body, it seemed to Lucy, was blacker – so black it seemed almost blue»⁹⁶. The Iron Woman's revenge can metaphorically be the revenge of the nature.

In the novel, a young and beautiful TV interviewer named Primula is investigating the strange screams at the factory. During her interviews with three men from the factory, Mr. Wells promises to speak to her later. However, while they are all present, they witness the company secretary turning into a giant eel. «His trousers and jacket lay flat and crumpled. A six-foot-long eel, as thick as a man's neck, lay squirming, knotting and unknotting, flailing its head this way and that, snapping its jaws which were the size of an Alsatian dog's – and truly were very like an Alsatian dog's»⁹⁷. Amidst all the strange occurrences, Mr. Wells is in a meeting with the Global Cleanup Company. Their job is to move waste from one country to another. As they sign an agreement, Mr. Wells is pleased and raises his glass of malt whisky because they are offering him to pay «£1 per tonne» to «get rid of one million tonnes of special chemical poisonous waste»⁹⁸. In a sudden turn of events, Mr. Wells transforms into a catfish, triggering chaos in the surrounding. Concurrently, Mr. Wells's secretary finds herself fleeing two massive sea lions, one of which is identified as Mr. Plotetzky. The situation is further aggravated by the metamorphosis of the factory's junior executives, secretaries, and managers into deep-sea creatures, all resulting from the rampant pollution. Impelled by the ecological damage, those who were not responsible for the pollution made concerted efforts to relocate the human animals to the river, ensuring the preservation of their lives.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

Furthermore, cameras are constantly recording everything that is happening, broadcasting it live on TV for the public to watch. It becomes apparent that the human-animal transmutations are attempting to flee from the river, where breathing has become impractical. Correspondingly, Christopher Manes' revelation about aside from humans, no animal is superior to any other animal in nature⁹⁹ illustrates the entangled relations between human and non-human, vice versa. In this scene, the metamorphosis of the human to animal paves the way for young readers to reimage about what if the conditions were reversed.

In the novel, *Iron Woman* seeks revenge for the pollution of nature, which has provoked a significant degree of anger within her. In response, she devises a plan: «Not just all over the town, but all over the country men had turned into giant fish, giant newts, giant insect larvae, giant water creatures of some kind. Every man over eighteen years old was in water»¹⁰⁰. However, the consequences of her revengeful decision prove to be challenging for women and children. When it is too difficult for wives to leave their husbands to swim in rivers, reservoirs, or ponds, they take them to the swimming pools or baths. For instance, Mr. Wells transforms into a giant catfish and swims in the pool at his new home. Even the Prime Minister turns into a six-foot-long dragonfly larva in the bath at Number Ten. Lucy's father transforms into a giant newt and stays in the bath while her mother feeds him cat food. Additionally, Hogarth's transforms into a shimmering green fog.

The novel presents the entangled relationship between humans and non-humans in the forthcoming parts. For instance, *Iron Woman's* revenge affects the entire population. When men are excluded from society, it causes a national disaster. There are power outages, computers stop working, TVs go blank, fuel becomes scarce, and telephones stop functioning. Lucy and Hogarth notice that things are getting worse, and Lucy's mother finds it difficult to recognize her husband, Charles. She then notices that something weird happens: «Charles is bubbling these funny dark bubbles»¹⁰¹, which are also being produced by other transformed animals. These bubbles combine and form dark clouds that fill the sky, causing smoke to be present in the air. The transformed men also release dark bubbles, creating «all over the land, that dark, ropy, webby fog [...] rising from the mouths» just «like tangling smokes from countless little campfires»¹⁰². Val Plumwood argues that this «ecological mess» has arisen from a culture that has been human-centred and reason-centred for «at least a couple of millennia» highlighting the fact that «contrived

⁹⁹ C. Manes, *Nature and Silence*, in C. Glotfelty, H. Fromm (edd.), *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, Athens, Georgia UP, 1996, pp. 15-29.

¹⁰⁰ Hughes, *The Iron Woman*, cit., pp. 85-86.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

blindness to ecological relationships is the fundamental condition underlying our destructive and insensitive technology and behavior»¹⁰³.

In the novel, the next morning is described as, «And the groaning too, outside, had stopped. But the sky was dark, as for a heavy thunderstorm. A dense, blue-blackish webby cloud lay very low over everything. The air was still, not a bird moved»¹⁰⁴. Suddenly, with the appearance of the Cloud-spider, everyone watches in awe as a tremendous storm unfolds within the dark cloud. Indeed, the spinning blur climb away into nothingness is the Iron Woman. After a while, everything calms down and returns to normal. As the following quote states: «So it seemed to be over. All the men climbed out of the rivers, the ponds, the swimming pools, the baths. Women ran everywhere, with bags full of clothes and towels. Slowly, life started up. Lights came on. Cars began to move. Shops opened. Telephones rang incessantly»¹⁰⁵. The narrator provides guidance on how to approach environmental problems and highlights the importance of understanding how our actions affect non-human entities and nature. The book is aimed at young readers and offers a sense of hopefulness and optimism, encouraging them to believe that change is possible. For example, the narrator offers sustainable economies, stating: «Chemists were baffled by it when they tried to find out what it was. But pretty soon they found what it was good for. It was the perfect fuel. Dissolved in water, it would do everything that oil and petrol would do, yet fish could live in it. It would burn in a fireplace with a grand flame but no fumes of any kind. And that first morning there were thousands of tons of it»¹⁰⁶.

According to the narrative presented in the novel, it can be inferred that substantial and favorable transformations have taken place. The story suggests that there has been a significant shift towards progress, and that the changes brought about have been instrumental in improving the situation. An important lesson is taught to the young readers. The significance of listening to the sound of the nature is described in the quote: «Farmers stood in their fields, listening and thinking. Factory owners sat in their offices, listening and thinking. The Prime Minister sat with his Cabinet Ministers, listening and thinking»¹⁰⁷. The entanglement of human and non-human, as demonstrated in the novel, serves to accentuate the inextricable relationship between them. From chaos to concession, the novel portrays the complex and intricate nature of this relationship, highlighting the significance of material and agents. As Stacy Alaimo posits, «within the material flows, exchanges, and interactions of substances, habitats, places, and environments», humans have already be-

¹⁰³ Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crises of Reason*, cit., p. 8.

¹⁰⁴ Hughes, *The Iron Woman*, cit., p. 92.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

come enmeshed with the natural world¹⁰⁸. This interdependence, characterized by a complex interplay of elements, serves as a reminder of the interconnectedness of living and non-living systems and the need for a comprehensive approach to understanding nature with its intricacies.

The conclusion of the novel validates the resolution of the environmental problem. Through vivid descriptions and compelling narration, the young readers comprehend the extent of the environmental damage caused and the scope of the actions taken to remedy the situation. The conclusion part thus serves as a testament to the effectiveness of the solutions employed, and the potential for positive change when faced with such challenges, as the quote shows: «The four of them [Iron Woman, Iron Man, Lucy and Hogarth] sat there, in the warm, morning sun, not saying anything. [...] This sound, they now noticed, seemed to have become stronger and different. It was not the faint sound of the creatures crying. It was music of a kind, from far off, far up»¹⁰⁹. The depiction of this relationship reveals the critical role that nature plays in shaping human experiences and, conversely, how human actions impact the natural environment. The novel stresses the significance of recognizing and respecting the interdependence of human and non-human entities for achieving sustainability and promoting a harmonious coexistence between the two.

Conclusion

Through a cautious examination of the novels *Melo* by Sevim Ak and *The Iron Woman* by Ted Hughes, from an ecocritical perspective, with a particular focus on the complex relationship between human and non-human entities, this study reveals that both protagonists ultimately develop an «ecological self» which aligns with Arne Naes' proposition. Melo and Lucy, the main characters of each novel, evolve from being socially conscious to ecologically conscious individuals, displaying a genuine concern for the well-being of both human and non-human living beings. This paper seeks to explore the nuances of environmental pollution and the loss of biodiversity, and how it is ultimately reflected in the development of each novel's characters and the storylines.

Both novels endeavor to address the social, political and environmental concerns of their respective authors while concurrently attempting to restore the frayed relationship between human and non-human. They express a hopeful outlook and promote environmental values such as ethics, mutual respect,

¹⁰⁸ S. Alaimo, *New Materialisms, Old Humanisms, or Following the Submersible*, «NORA: Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research», vol. 19, n. 4, 2011, pp. 280-284.

¹⁰⁹ Hughes, *The Iron Woman*, cit., p. 109.

and empathy towards all living beings, encompassing both human and non-human entities. They strive to reconcile the damaged bond with nature explicitly and inspire children to understand their responsibility towards the environment and our planet.

In the realm of children's literature, novels uniquely inspire and engage young readers in discussions pertaining to environmental matters and the relationship between nature and culture. As Kerslake posits, the novels can «empower young readers to productively engage with the challenges of climate change by addressing critical issues of ecological problems, raising environmental awareness in young readers and even, perhaps, offering solutions by calling attention to understanding the relationship between nature and culture as a holistic unit»¹¹⁰. Unquestionably, by addressing critical ecological issues, increasing environmental awareness, and presenting potential solutions, novels can serve to empower young readers to constructively tackle the challenges presented by climate change.

Both of the literary works endeavor to promote a biocentric viewpoint among their young readers, thereby encouraging a more sustainable approach to the ecological crises that currently threaten the planet. Furthermore, both works demonstrate the efficacy of children's literature in addressing the complex relationship among society, industrialization, and nature. By emphasizing the need to maintain the natural balance, these works encourage readers to take responsibility for their environmental impact. It is worth noting that any disruption to the ecological balance of nature will have far-reaching implications for humans. Therefore, it is paramount to preserve and protect the environment. Children's literature can play a vital role in addressing the challenges of climate change by inspiring and empowering young readers to take action.

The novels under consideration present a keen awareness of the interdependence of humans and non-human entities and encourage young readers to have a more comprehensive view of the world, by considering the impact of human actions on environment. They urge individuals, organizations, and governments to work together to preserve and protect the natural world, recognizing that our well-being is closely linked to the planet's health. Through their message, the novels emphasize that humans are not separate from nature, but rather an integral part of it. This insight is of vital importance across diverse disciplines and particularly pertinent in our current era, where environmental stewardship and sustainable practices are increasingly imperative. The novels offer a message that resonates with contemporary concerns, urging human to recognize the fundamental relationship between humans and the environment and to adopt a more conscientious approach to our actions than ever before.

¹¹⁰ Kerslake, *Reading The Iron Woman in Times of Crisis as a Tale of Hope*, cit., p. 441.