

THE SATIRICAL ELEMENT IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL AND DYSTOPIAN FICTION OF BEN ELTON: THIS OTHER EDEN

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Abstract

'This Other Eden' is the incredibly a wonderful novel with full of ironical elements with the very sensitive 'global issue of envirotarian'sperspectives'.The novel is set in the future, is highly imaginative, carrying the facts with it in a very amusing and contemplative way .

The devastation of the earth is portrayed with man's continuous exploitation to the nature and natural resources. It is indigestible fact that the environment will be collapsed in near future, if due care is not taken to protect it.

In this novel, people have invested their money on 'cloudosphere' (artificially created enclosed environment), which itself is satirically dependent on the earth, so we can assume that the people who are parasite to the environment are trying to be independent beings, living within the cloudosphere, (I would like to term it as 'paraenvironment'), instead of adopting an ecofriendly approach to life, some people have invested on this 'dome shaped' habitat (which is the great satire on consumer capitalism), in which water, food and air is endlessly recycled in a 'closed environment',(the base root of this imagination goes to the air condition), and to the dismay of the ecological sphere and biosphere, some persons can survive within 'cloudosphere', without being bothered of what ecological horrors may be taking place on the earth out of that area of cloudospere! This concept of the novel lead us to think of the eco-terrorism, which is the powerful threat to the environmental life and the species on the earth.

Keywords- *satire, ecocriticism, literature and ecology, environment, sustainable development.*

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The novel 'This Other Eden' is incredibly a wonderful novel with full of ironical elements carrying a very sensitive global issue of the balance of the nature, biosphere, or in simple term 'the environment'. The novel is set in future, is highly imaginative, taking the facts with it in a very amazing and contemplative way. In short, it is a satirical novel by Ben Elton, advocating the greater environmentalism. Being the environmental fiction, it covers the area of eco-criticism theory. Eco-criticism is the cultural artifact of nature and culture, is the study of environment in literature. Eco-criticism takes subject connecting between nature and culture.

According to Barry Commoner's first law of ecology, "Everything is connected to everything else". Means, Literature does not float on the material world in aesthetic ether, it plays important role in complex global system, energy, matter and ideas to interact.

Eco-criticism can be characterized as a distinguished form from the other critical approaches. Generally, a literary theory examines the writer, his text and the world. In most cases in the literature, 'the world' is the synonymous with society and social sphere. Eco-criticism expands the notion of the "world", the 'entire-eco-sphere'. The term 'eco-criticism' is coined by William Ruekert in his essay 'Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism' in 1978, by which he meant, application of ecological concept in the study of literature'. Many critics favour the term 'eco' over the 'enviro', because the term 'eco' is analogous to science and ecology, that studies the relationship between human culture and the physical world, whereas the term 'enviro' is anthropocentric and dualistic which implies human at the center surrounded by the physical environment. The term 'literary ecology' is introduced by Joseph W. Meeker in his work, 'The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology' (1972)

Benjamin Charles "Ben" Elton was born in London, Cratford(3rd May 1959), his mother Mary was an English teacher, and his father Professor Lewis Elton was a physicist and educational researcher. Elton's father belonged to a German Jewish family and his mother to English family, being raised in the Church of England. Elton developed a non-religious faith and considered himself as an atheist. Elton completed his education in Surrey, South Warwickshire College in Stratford-upon-Avon and the University of Manchester. Elton is an inborn artist, he is an English comedian, author, playwright, actor and director. He has been a part of London's alternative comedy movement in 1980s and wrote a series of works such The Young Ones and Blackadder, and worked as a stand-up comedian on stage and Television. His works

of eighties were political satire then afterwards he published thirteen novels and more lately become known for writing the musical *We Will Rock You* (2002) and *Love Never Dies* (2010) which is the sequel to *The Phantom Of Opera* (1986), a musical by Andrew Lloyd Webber based on the novel of Gaston Leroux on the same title.

He has published fourteen novels since 1989, all published by Black Swan, except for *Stark*, which was published by Sphere Books, and was made into an Australian Television serial in 1993 starring Elton. The list of his novels are as *Stark* (1989), *Gridlock* (1991), *This Other Eden* (1993), *Popcorn* (1996) which won Gold Dagger Award for fiction from Crime Writers' Association of Great Britain, *Blast from the Past* (1998) *Inconceivable* (1999), that was made into a film later on, *Dead Famous* (2001), *High Society* (2002) that won WH Smith's People Choice Fiction Award, *Past Mortem* (2004), *The First Casualty* (2005), *Chart Throb* (2006), *Blind Faith* (2007), *Meltdown* (2010), *Two Brothers* (2012). Elton successfully wrote in partnership with Richard Curtis. Together they wrote *Blackadder II*, *Blackadder the third* (in an episode Elton appeared as a bomb-wielding anarchist) and *Blackadder Goes Fourth*. *Blackadder* had starring of Rowan Atkinson, which brought him fame and fortune.

By the success of previous series of books, Elton and Curtis were inspired to write *Blackadder Goes Fourth* upon finding world war to be a particularly apt subject for a situation comedy. This series, which dealt with greater, darker themes than prior *Blackadder* episodes, was widely praised for their scripts, especially for the final episode. Elton and Curtis also wrote Atkinson's 1986 stage show, *The new Review*, and Mr. Bean's famous exam episode.

On a publicity tour for *Past Mortem* in 2004, Elton mused on the high school reunion theme and his own drama college reunion: "We'd had a very happy time all together, so there were no old scores to be settled really, we'd been a pretty happy bunch. And yet one person, who'd been a bit of a golden boy – he certainly went out with a girl I was besotted and unrequitedly in love with – he came up and he said, 'Why did you come? Was it to show off?' That really surprised me, that anyone would think that ... he came kind of carrying my agenda. It was weird. I hasten to add I didn't think my life to be more successful than anybody else's. If you're happy and honest and fulfilled in what you do, then you're having a successful life".

Like the feminist movements brought the changes in the world for women contributing in the cannon of literature, business and in every profession job and market, helping to transform the world, similarly the eco-conscious studies about ecology and ecological movements are required to transform the world and save the earth from the ecological crisis. Eco-criticism has a vibrant present and a promising future when we can expect to see eco-critical scholarship in India as a more interdisciplinary, multicultural and international studies. Though it has been a white's movement, the time when environment will be connected to the social justice and when a multi-cultural diversity will be encouraged to contribute in this discussion, then it will become a multi-ethnic movement.

In 1985, Loren Acton, an astronomer flew on a challenger Eight Space Shuttle as a Payload Specialist and observed, "Looking outward to the blackness of space, sprinkled with the glory of

the universe of lights, I saw majesty- but no welcome. Below was a welcoming planet. There contained in the thin moving, incredibly fragile shell of the biosphere- is everything that is dear to you, all the human drama and comedy. That's where life is; that's where all the good stuff is".

The environmental problems are the global problems, so its solution require the world wide collaboration. "In 'The Country and the City', Raymond William surveys the often escapist English literary responses to these changes from the landscape enclosures from the early modern period into the Industrial era of the nineteenth century. As early as Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* (1854) and then more recently with John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* (1939), with Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), writers have warned us about the environmental damage caused by Industrial Societies". (Westling- p.I)

This novel, 'This Other Eden', is an anthropocentric earth centered in which the title itself is a satire in its biblical root. The devastation of the earth is portrayed in the novel with man's continuous exploitation to it. It is indigestible fact that the environment will be collapsed in near future if due care is not taken to protect it.

"New challenges from globally spreading pollution, wildlife extinction, climate change, increasing environmental injustice for vulnerable communities in the global south have stimulated poets and fiction writers to increase their attention on to environmental dangers. Novels such as P. D. James's *The Children of Men*, Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, Frank Schatzing's *The Swarm*, Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*; all testify to this trend". (Westling- p.6)

The Humanities and the environmental crisis, is the consequences of the human actions that are damaging the planet's basic life support system; Either we have to change or face the global catastrophe, we have to contribute to the environmental restoration , the current environmental problem are largely of our own making, or by product of our culture.

A Historian Donald Worster explains, "We are facing a Global Crisis today, not because how eco-system functions but rather because of how our ethical system functions. Getting through the crisis requires understanding our impact on the nature as precisely as possible, but even more, it requires understanding those ethical system and using that understanding to reform them. Historians, along with literary scholars, anthropologist, and philosophers cannot do the reforming, of course, but they can help with the understanding". (Glottfelty-Introduction-xxi)

The novel, 'This Other Eden' focuses on the British writer Nathan who is trying to sell his idea of 'claustrosphere commercial (a satire on the post-modern consumer age) to the Tolstoy, who accepts the idea and assign him to work with Max (an actor). The commercial represents a change in emphasis for the advertising campaign; up to now claustropheres have been sold as a kind of fall back insurance, just in case the environment collapses. However, now that virtually everybody owns at least a basic model, sales are falling and the company is having to try and sell upgrade and improvement packages instead. The new advertising, therefore, attempts to

convince people for the first time that the environment truly is doomed and they are inevitably going to have to live in their claustrospheres. Initially we are known that Jurgon Thor is the leader of the 'eco-terrorism movement' and despises 'claustrospheres' but ironically we come to know the later part of the novel that Thor himself is the owner of the company of claustrosphere. Here, people have invested in a claustrosphere (which may be like life insurance package) During a subsequent meeting with Tolstoy, Nathan makes a joking suggestion that it would be ironic if his company actually covertly sponsored the eco-terrorism movement led by Jurgon Thor, which despises the claustrosphere company since it represents, in their eyes, an abolishment of mankind's responsibility to care for the environment. Nathan is subsequently murdered as he plays a virtual reality game with Max. Max sets out to investigate the murder, falling in with Rosalie Connolly, an eco-terrorist working for Thor's organization. Max finally comes to know that Thor and Tolstoy are in fact partners. The eco-terrorists raids, whilst highly successful, never present more than a minor problem to the vast claustrosphere company, but do grab headlines and bring awareness of the looming eco-disaster into the public mind - prompting them to buy more claustrospheres. Tolstoy confesses that he has even geared his advertising campaign to work in perfect sync with the terrorists, with new commercials ready to roll out instantly after each attack.

After a confrontation between Max, Rosalie and in which Jurgon is killed, Tolstoy decides to evade justice by leaking news indicating that the ecology is finally collapsing. The news is suddenly full of stories of environmental catastrophe, and people are told that they need to lock themselves in their claustrospheres for several decades. It is termed as the "rat run" which removes the large bulk of humanity from the world, effectively ending the current civilization!

In one of the novel's great ironies, one of the by-products of the vanishing of global society is that all industry ceases, ending further pollution of the environment. Freed of this burden, Earth begins to gradually recover from the damage inflicted so far.

'This Other Eden' can be said as a novel about eco-terrorism where 'Claustrosphere, like an artificially created enclosed environment, (which itself is ironically dependent on the ecology of the earth) in which the rich and moneyed people can save their life at the time of natural disaster or the environmental crisis! So we can assume that, the people who are parasite upon the environment or the ecology are trying to be independent by saving their life in claustrospheres at the time of natural catastrophe by creating their own par-environment! This foolish idea may lead us to the boisterous mirth, that people instead of adopting some eco-friendly approach, they are investing in a project which is again a nuisance to the ecology of the earth! This can be a satire on the 'Plastic Age', the recycling and re-use of the plastic. It is a satire on the rush of knowledge and the science and research and the industries which are good for nothing to save the biosphere, and to balance the ecology on the earth...it is all about a rush of the fools where leader himself is the corrupt! (I refer here, to the Jurgon Thor in this novel, who is an eco-terrorist and a villain). Here, I would like to quote Alexander Pope who said, 'Fools rush in where angels fear to tread!' It is a satire on the knowledge of the scholars which falls short against the secret of the universe! It is the satire on the human advancements which

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are used in a destructive manner instead of using in a creative manner. Like nuclear atomic bombs, World Wars, Emergence of Industrialism, Class conflict (elite, bourgeois, and proletariat) man's insanity for the possession of power and riches! Man's greed, conflict of races class and sex since the ages in history! Human nature is full of hatred jealousy, rage and conflict, always intending to win! To win over the weaker, the poorer! And the point of the time when he tries to win over the nature, he fails. And hence, he fails to create 'This Other Eden'.

This is a satire on the advancement of technology which is useless for the sustainable development and support the life of the species on the earth. Industries laid human away from the lap of the nature and to rush after the machines, the vehicles, the air-condition (and the emission of the carbon mono-oxide) without which life seems impossible since the modern age. "That physical contrast is continuously present to me, but it is not the only contrast. Within the Black Mountain Village, as again here, there is a deep contrast in which so much feeling is held: between what seems an unmediated nature- a physical awareness of trees, birds and moving shapes of land and a working agriculture, in which much of the nature is in fact being produced". (Raymond William- p.3)

The investment on this dome-shaped artificial habitat (a great satire on consumer capitalism) in which water, food and air is endlessly recycled in this completely closed environment. A few people could survive within the claustrospheres to the dismay of the environmental crisis, and they can survive without being bothered of what ecological horrors are occurring outside! This concept of the novel leads us to think about the upcoming eco-terrorism which is a powerful threat to the environment and the life and species on the earth.

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