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From Ecocide to Ecohumanism: Reading Kenneth Anderson's 'The Bond of Love'

Dr Sangita Patil

Associate Professor

LBS Govt First Grade College

R.T. Nagar

Bengaluru North University

Bengaluru 560032

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4198-7812>

Abstract

The paper examines Kenneth Anderson's 'The Bond of Love' at three levels: how the modern attitude, which can be considered as ecocide in the form of deforestation, hunting and encroaching upon habitats, impacts animals such as the bear, Bruno. This attitude attempts to shift towards considering wild animals as part of human beings; however, due to the ethical limits of human ownership, this is not possible. Further, there is redemption in returning the wild animal to its habitat as an ecological ethic. It presents human action on one level as ecocide and, on the other, as the need of the hour to return and reconcile from an ecohumanist perspective.

Keywords: Ecocide, ecohumanism, orphan, domestication, coexistence

Introduction

This paper re-reads Kenneth Anderson's *The Bond of Love* as a narrative journey that necessarily traverses ecocide to arrive at ecohumanism. The text begins with an act of ecocide—manifested in habitat encroachment, hunting, and deforestation—which orphans the sloth bear Bruno and forces an unnatural intersection between the wild and the human world. The subsequent act of bringing Bruno home represents a well-intentioned yet anthropocentric attempt to compensate for this loss through domestication and affectionate ownership. However, the narrative exposes the ethical failure of this model, as the wild cannot be contained within human domesticity. The decision to relocate Bruno to the Mysore Zoo appears to be an act of ecological atonement. Yet, the story's true ethical turn lies in its conclusion, where Bruno's recognition of his human family after months of separation subverts the logic of complete return. Though the narrative route inevitably passes through ecocide, the orphaning, displacement, and domestication of the wild, its ethical destination compels us to become ecohumanists, where love is redefined not as possession, but as enduring responsibility and respectful coexistence.

The two theoretical concepts applied to critically analyse the story are ecocide and ecohumanism. Ecocide refers to the exploitation of the natural world driven by human selfish motives. It is pertinent to draw upon Polly Higgins, an environmental lobbyist and expert in ecocide law, who observes, "View the planet as an inert thing and a monetary value can be imposed. In one fell swoop the planet becomes a commodity. The

planet becomes property to trade, an asset upon which a price has been imposed (Higgins 4).” The modern world has forgotten that the natural world is also alive. Maddened by the pursuit of progress, we are driven not by need but by mere desire. Therefore, in this situation, we need to go back to the root: ecohumanism. Ecohumanism signifies a reciprocal relationship between human beings and the natural world: “An equivalence relation of man and woman by dissolving dualistic approach to resolve ecological crisis through common consensus (Patil, 146).”

Ecocide to Ecohumanism: Orphaning to Reconciliation

The conventional utterance that a snake has 'entered' our domestic or occupational space warrants critical re-examination. This anthropocentric framing, which I have frequently interrogated, raises a fundamental ontological question: has the reptile transgressed into the human domain, or have humans encroached upon its habitat? Such linguistic constructions obscure the material reality of habitat destruction, wherein nonhuman beings are rendered displaced and homeless by anthropogenic expansion, yet are discursively positioned as intruders. In essence, the trespass is ours, not theirs. This inversion is poignantly foregrounded in the opening scene of Kenneth Anderson's short story 'The Bond of Love', which invites ethical contemplation. The indiscriminate driving and shooting of pigs provoke the question of their displacement and survival—where might these dispossessed creatures seek refuge and sustenance? The scene culminates in an act of profound ecocidal violence when the narrator's companion shoots a mother bear carrying her cub. Anderson renders the moment with stark pathos: “Then we saw it was a baby bear that had been riding on its mother's back when the sudden shot had killed her. The little creature ran around its prostrate parent making a pitiful noise” (Anderson 108).

The bear cub's defensive struggle against the narrator and its subsequent clinging for solace marks a critical shift from an intrinsic to an abstract relationship with nature. What was once an organic, lived kinship between human and nonhuman beings has now been ruptured to such an extent that even our acts of concern become abstract.

This transformation is illuminated by Vandana Shiva's critique of development as a force of alienation. As she observes, “Development has meant the ecological and cultural rupture of bonds with nature, and within society, it has meant the transformation of organic communities into groups of uprooted and alienated individuals searching for abstract identities” (Shiva 99). The episode of the orphaned cub exemplifies this condition. After systematically destroying its habitat and killing its mother, the human attempt to console the cub does not restore the lost intrinsic bond. Rather, it becomes an abstract identity, a performative act of compassion enacted after the organic connection has already been violently severed.

The domestication of the wild and its assimilation into a human lifestyle constitutes a futile act of nurturing, reducing its existence to that of a bonsai life—an artificially stunted and contained form of being: “Bruno soon took to drinking milk from a bottle. It was a step further, and within a very few days he started eating and drinking everything else” (Anderson 109). This ecocidal attitude must be reoriented toward an ecohumanist perspective, an imperative in the contemporary ecological crisis.

As Bruno grew rapidly, it became increasingly difficult to accommodate him within the domestic space of the narrator's family, leading to his eventual displacement to the zoo. The zoo emerges here as another manifestation of abstract identity. Animals that inherently belong to the wilderness are confined within four walls for the purpose of human amusement and entertainment. The bear, which had formed a deep attachment to the narrator's wife, was unable to adapt to life in the zoo. The act of bringing him back and restoring to him his own autonomous space constitutes an ecohumanist praxis, as evident in the text: “...the cage was landed on to the island and Baba was released. He was delighted, standing on his hind legs...” (Anderson 112).

The creation of an open space in the form of an island gestures towards the possibility of a reciprocal relationship between human beings and the natural world. Rather than enforcing domination or domestication, such a space allows for coexistence grounded in mutual respect and autonomy. It marks a shift from an anthropocentric model of control to an ecohumanist ethic of cohabitation, where the nonhuman

is granted agency and dignity within its own realm, while human responsibility is redefined as stewardship rather than subjugation.

Conclusion

This paper examines the necessity of fostering interconnection among living beings through shared understanding and coexistence. The narrative arc — from the narrator's encounter with the bear cub Bruno at the cost of losing its mother, to its subsequent domestication, and ultimately its return to a space of its own — encapsulates the detrimental consequences of an ecocidal ethos that continues to take a heavy toll on nonhuman life. The process of taming and humanizing Bruno reflects a broader anthropocentric tendency to control and reshape the natural world according to human convenience, thereby stripping the wild of its intrinsic autonomy.

Conversely, the text also foregrounds an urgent need to return to our ecological roots and to ensure equitable space for all living beings. The final act of restoring Bruno to an island of his own becomes symbolic of restitution and ecological justice. This trajectory signifies a critical navigation from an ecocidal paradigm toward an ecohumanist milestone, marking a shift from exploitation to ethical cohabitation and acknowledging the interconnectedness of all forms of existence.

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