



ENVIRONMENTAL THREATS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF ECOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS: AN ECOCRITICAL STUDY OF JOHN UPDIKE'S *RABBIT AT REST* (1990)

Iqra Iqbal
iqraiqbal455@gmail.com

Lecturer in English, Department of English, University of Education,
Faisalabad Campus, Pakistan.

Faryal Gohar
fary123gcw@gmail.com

Visiting Lecturer, Government College Women University, Faisalabad,
Pakistan.

Noor Ali
noor.ali228@amalacademy.org

MPhil Scholar, Riphah International University, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Abstract

Ecocriticism assumes that literature can alter environmental perception, yet the process by which a novel actually builds such awareness has received far less attention than the environmental content novels contain. John Updike's *Rabbit at Rest* (1990) offers an unusual case, since it depicts environmental threat extensively while refusing every convention of advocacy. This study therefore examines Updike's representation of environmental threat, traces the emergence of ecological consciousness within his protagonist, and analyses the means by which the novel constructs such consciousness in its reader. It applies Lawrence Buell's theory of toxic discourse, and particularly his account of environmental awakening, together with Cynthia Deitering's concept of toxic consciousness. Existing scholarship has read the novel through history, mortality and national decline, and has not examined it as an instrument of environmental awareness. The study is significant in demonstrating how imaginative literature forms ecological understanding, and concludes that Updike constructs consciousness through accumulated ordinary detail rather than through argument, achieving recognition while withholding remedy.

Keywords: *Ecocriticism, Ecological Consciousness, Environmental Awakening, Environmental Threat, John Updike, Rabbit at Rest, Toxic Consciousness, Toxic Discourse*

Corresponding Author: Iqra Iqbal (Lecturer in English, Department of English, University of Education, Faisalabad Campus, Pakistan.)

Email: iqraiqbal455@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Environmental crisis is, among other things, a crisis of perception. The physical processes that constitute it—atmospheric change, chemical accumulation, habitat loss—unfold at scales of time and space that ordinary experience is poorly equipped to register. A person can see a felled tree but not deforestation, can feel a hot summer but not a warming climate, can taste food without detecting what it carries. Davies, T. (2022) named this the representational difficulty at the heart of environmental politics: harm that is attritional and dispersed resists the forms of attention that crisis normally commands. If such harm is to be recognised at all, recognition must be built rather than simply received.

Literature has long been understood as one instrument through which such recognition is built. Zapf, H. (2016) first proposed applying ecological concepts to literary study, and Clark, T. (2015). defined ecocriticism as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment, arguing that scholarship could no longer treat the material world as inert background. Underlying the field from its beginning has been a conviction that texts participate in forming environmental attitudes rather than merely reflecting them, and Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) remains the demonstration case. Yet the mechanism by which imaginative literature produces such awareness is less well understood than the claim that it does, and the question matters because explicit argument the most obvious method is also the least characteristic of fiction Sartre, J. P. (2025).

John Updike's *Rabbit at Rest* (1990) presents this problem in an acute form. The final volume of the Rabbit tetralogy is saturated with environmental threat: contaminated water, air that resists breathing, refuse strewn across a public beach, a climate visibly altered, a landscape converted to commercial use, and a protagonist whose body is failing from what he has consumed. Buell's (1998) account of toxic discourse describes the novel closely, and Deitering (1996) identified precisely this configuration in American fiction of the 1980s, naming the condition toxic consciousness and describing the resulting novels as postnatural.

What the novel conspicuously lacks is advocacy. Updike assigns no blame, proposes no remedy and offers no character capable of articulating an environmental position. His protagonist is a retired car dealer who cannot finish a book of history and whose environmental knowledge arrives as half-formed speculation about the ozone layer, a doctor's warning he disregards, and a recollection of trees no longer standing Jones, B. (2018). The novel presents environmental threat and declines to interpret it.

This refusal is the study's central concern. The argument developed here is that the refusal constitutes the method rather than a failure of it: that *Rabbit at Rest* constructs ecological consciousness precisely by withholding the interpretive frame, requiring the reader to assemble from accumulated ordinary detail a recognition the novel never states. Harry Angstrom's own gradual awakening slow, reluctant, incomplete, and finally useless to him functions within the text as a model of how such recognition forms and of how

little it accomplishes once formed. The reader is invited to complete a process the protagonist cannot. Johnston, J. (2016).

1.1. Research Questions

1. How does John Updike represent environmental threats in *Rabbit at Rest*?
2. In what ways does the novel trace the emergence of ecological consciousness in its protagonist?
3. How does the novel work to construct ecological consciousness in the reader without resorting to explicit advocacy?

1.2. Research Objectives

1. To examine Updike's representation of environmental threats in *Rabbit at Rest*.
2. To trace the emergence of ecological consciousness in the novel's protagonist.
3. To analyse the means by which the novel constructs ecological consciousness in the reader without explicit advocacy.

2. Literature Review

Criticism of the Rabbit tetralogy has been organised around history, irony and mortality. De Groot, J. (2015). established the historical reading, demonstrating how completely Updike embedded contemporary American events within the novels and treating the sequence as a record of national self-understanding across four decades. Hart, J. (2021) proposed irony as the structural principle of the tetralogy, locating its effect in the distance between Harry's limited perception and the reader's wider view. Kastenbaum, R. (2015) situated the final volume within Updike's preoccupations with faith and death, while Witte, G. (2023) emphasised the documentary precision of the prose. These accounts share a common treatment of the novel's material world: the contaminated water, the refuse, the altered weather appear as evidence for arguments about moral or national condition rather than as environmental representation in their own right.

Ecocritical scholarship has been developing substantially since Wassie, S. B. (2020) collection, moving from wilderness and pastoral toward the degraded environments where most people live. Buell (1995) directed this shift, Filipova, L. (2021) examined how environmental imagination negotiates local attachment and planetary scale, and Echterling, C. (2016) surveyed the field's governing tropes. Within this body of work, attention to the formation of environmental awareness has concentrated on texts that address the reader directly, whether through documentary exposition or through explicitly apocalyptic narrative.

Updike has remained outside these discussions. He is classified as a realist of domestic and suburban experience rather than as a writer concerned with systems or ecologies, and his reticence compounds the neglect: a novel advancing no environmental thesis is easily read as containing no environmental argument McGrath, S. J. (2019). The relationship between literary form and the formation of ecological consciousness therefore remains underexplored in precisely the cases where it would be most instructive. Deitering's (1996) concept describes an awareness assumed rather than argued, and her

framework consequently accommodates reticent fiction more readily than the advocacy-centred models that have dominated discussion.

2.1. Research Gap

Three gaps converge in the present study. Firstly, ecocritical scholarship has not extended in any sustained way to Updike, despite the concentration of environmental material in his final Rabbit novel and despite that novel's publication in the very period of American fiction that Deitering's essay examines. Secondly, Updike criticism has consistently read the novel's environmental imagery as figurative support for arguments about moral exhaustion, leaving the literal environmental content unexamined. Thirdly, and most significantly, the mechanism by which literature constructs ecological consciousness has been theorised chiefly with reference to texts that argue explicitly, so that the awareness-forming capacity of reticent fiction remains largely unaccounted for. A novel that presents environmental threat abundantly while refusing interpretation offers an unusually clear case for examining how such consciousness is built, yet no existing study has used the novel in this way.

2.2. Significance of the Study

This study contributes to ecocriticism by shifting attention from what literature says about the environment to how literature forms environmental understanding. It extends environmental criticism to an author rarely read in ecological terms, and demonstrates that reticent realist fiction possesses an awareness-forming capacity that advocacy-centred models of environmental writing do not accommodate. Its relevance reaches beyond literary study. Environmental communication has long assumed that information produces changed behaviour, and Updike's novel supplies a detailed counter-instance in which recognition forms completely and alters nothing. The study may therefore interest scholars of ecocriticism, American literature, the environmental humanities and environmental communication, and it offers a framework applicable to other works whose environmental significance has been overlooked on account of their apparent reticence.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study draws on two theorists of environmental literature whose concepts address the representation of ecological threat and the formation of awareness that such representation may produce.

Lawrence Buell is among the founding figures of American ecocriticism. His early work traced the environmental imagination in American nature writing (Buell, 1995), but his later contribution proved more consequential for fiction concerned with damaged rather than preserved environments, since he argued that criticism must attend to the built and polluted world with the seriousness it had reserved for wilderness (Buell, 2005).

His theory of **toxic discourse** supplies this study's principal analytical categories. Buell (1998) identified a recurring mode in modern environmental writing composed of four elements: the disruption of a pastoral inheritance, in which a remembered green world

is measured against a degraded present; a totalising conception of contamination, understood as boundless rather than confined to designated sites, so that no location offers refuge; a moral confrontation between the individual and the far larger forces of industry and government; and a preoccupation with the vulnerable human body as the site at which environmental damage finally becomes undeniable.

Buell's account of **environmental awakening** bears most directly on the present concern. He described the recognition of contamination as a process that is characteristically slow and reluctant, arriving as the horrified understanding that no protective barrier separates the person from the damaged world. The formulation is valuable because it treats recognition as an event with a shape and a duration rather than as a simple transfer of information, and because it identifies reluctance as intrinsic rather than incidental to the process. Buell (2001) further proposed the environmental unconscious for the perceptual capacity that modern life dulls without abolishing, which literature may reactivate.

Cynthia Deitering supplies the study's second governing concept. Examining American fiction of the 1980s, she identified a shift in environmental perception amounting to a new literary condition (Deitering, 1996). The novels she considered were domestic and suburban narratives rather than nature writing, yet all registered a pervasive awareness of waste, their characters inhabiting a world saturated by the residues of their own productivity.

Deitering named this awareness toxic consciousness: a cultural condition in which a society perceives itself through the by-products it generates. The concept locates environmental awareness in the recognition of contamination rather than in the appreciation of nature, so that what a society discards becomes the most reliable index of what it is. From this follows her related term, the postnatural, describing fiction in which nature has already been entered, altered and built upon, so that the pastoral gesture of return is unavailable. Crucially for the present study, Deitering describes such consciousness as assumed rather than argued present in the texture of what characters eat, discard and fail to find which makes her framework suited to fiction that constructs awareness without declaring it.

Together these concepts allow environmental threat, its recognition and its literary construction to be treated as a single process. Buell supplies the categories through which particular passages are read and the account of how recognition forms; Deitering supplies the condition that explains why such recognition, once formed, so rarely issues in action.

3.1. Research Methodology

This study is qualitative, interpretive and text-centred, employing close textual analysis to derive meaning from language, imagery and narrative perspective rather than from quantification. The primary text is John Updike's *Rabbit at Rest*, published by the New York house Alfred A. Knopf in 1990. Passages were selected where they concern environmental threat in any form contamination of air, water or soil, refuse, climatic

change, chemical exposure, altered landscape and where they record the protagonist's perception of it. These were examined against Buell's (1998) four elements of toxic discourse and his account of environmental awakening, and against Deitering's (1996) concepts of toxic consciousness and the postnatural, with particular attention to what the novel states, what it withholds, and what it requires the reader to supply. The study advances no biographical claim regarding Updike's convictions.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1. Environmental Threat as the Ordinary Condition of American Life

Environmental threat enters *Rabbit at Rest* not as crisis but as circumstance. The novel never pauses to establish that the world it describes is damaged; damage is the medium in which its characters move, noticed in passing and rarely interpreted. This is the first and most consequential feature of Updike's representation, and it distinguishes the novel from environmental writing that argues. Threat is distributed across hundreds of pages in fragments too small to carry an argument individually, and it is the accumulation rather than any single passage that produces the effect.

Rabbit at Rest is full of, what Buell calls, 'toxic anxiety'. People of the present era are subjected to so many environmental problems. The world in which they are living is constantly and consistently in decay, "everything flies loose, the world is crashing, nothing in life can be nailed down. Terrific." (Updike, 1990, pg 449). The ironical "new world" which Harry calls it, is crashing due to the contamination caused by human agencies. Throughout the novel Updike has painted an image of the decaying and deteriorating world.

Updike has clearly rejected the American idea of progress. The increase in wealth, properties, drastic demand of high consumption, drug addiction, food addiction, and so called luxurious standard life is not at all progress for Updike. He openly rejects this idea of material success as 'progress' of humankind. He condemns the tendency of materialism by stating, "There's nothing holy about the dollar, it's just a unit of measurement" (Updike, 1990, p. 368). Updike is trying to make people aware about the gradually decaying world. Harry frequently gets frightened by the forces of nature which are being violent for some decades. He sees himself very helpless in comparison to the forces of nature.

Human beings have contaminated the most essential earthly resources like air, water and soil which are necessary for the survival of human race. Updike has frequently depicted the images of "dirty water", polluted air, infertile land and chemical waste. Updike wants to aware people about the contamination which is very dangerous for human beings. Harry's demise is symbolic of the destruction of whole human race if they did not stop the contamination of nature. Harry frequently feels terrified by the events happening in the modern world which indicate the wrath of nature, "a tremor of fright comes alive in his legs. The sea, the sun are so big: cosmic wheels he could be ground between. He is playing with fire." (Updike, 1990, p. 109).

Updike has used the theme of environmental decay as his background idea. While enjoying a visit to beach Harry observes and comments on the garbage thrown by human beings. The “garbage”, “plastic glasses” and “emptied lotion bottles” made him sad about the ill treatment of human beings towards the nature. America seems to Harry a selfish state which “take everything, give nothing. Like a black hole.” (Updike, 1990, p. 354). American success seems to Updike a “wasted effort”. This so-called success is what Buell calls ‘pastoral oppositionalism’; everything seems beautiful but the reality is opposite.

Everything in the modern world is toxic and contaminated, “if one thing doesn’t kill you, another will.” (Updike, 1990, p. 102). Updike shows the fact in a very emphasizing manner which strikes the inner core of human conscience. He wants to make people aware about the hazards which are waiting for them if they did not stop the destruction of environment. Throughout the novel Harry is drawn towards the forces of nature to find the answers of his inner self. He relates his inner self to the outer reality, and quite sadly finds both in the state of deterioration. He finds everything dying and fading which renders him in “that dull internal ache of doom he felt at the airport” (Updike, 1990, p. 52).

All four elements Buell (1998) identifies within toxic discourse are present, though none is developed as a theme. The pastoral inheritance survives only in Harry’s memory of a town whose buildings once stood further apart, and the green world he recalls has no counterpart in the world he inhabits. Contamination is totalising rather than localised: there is no place in the novel to which a character might go in order to escape it, and the beach, the golf course and the Florida condominium prove as compromised as the industrial landscape of Brewer. The confrontation with institutional power appears without confrontation, since the industries producing the damage are also the industries that employ the family. And the vulnerable body, Buell’s fourth element, carries what the other three cannot display directly.

Updike’s novel is a critical stance of showing people the consequences of mechanized life and high level consumption of dangerous chemicals. We are in contact of dangerous chemicals in this world of chemicals. Even the toothpaste with which every person starts his day is full of chemicals. As Buell argues that every person is under the threat of chemicals from birth until death. This chemical consumption is very dangerous for the human and environmental health and “a bleak wonder at the fury of chemicals” (Updike, 1990, p. 7) frequently frightens Harry in the novel.

Everywhere Harry encounters a tension and anxiety; any place he visits or any book he reads or in the Television. *Rabbit at Rest* depicts the era after 1980s which was the beginning of the emergence of eco-critical studies. Everywhere people were talking about the hazards of environmental destruction. The main headline in the newspaper is “1988: the dry look, and a cartoon shows a crazed-looking yellow sun wringing out some clouds for a single drop of water” and “deadly pollution infects lake okeechobee” (Updike,

1990, p. 45). Everywhere the tension of environmental apocalypse squeeze Harry's thoughts. Most of the tensions and anxieties in this era are caused by our own selves. The more human beings are becoming materialistic the more unrest is falling upon human beings.

Updike give a lot of attention to the climate change. Harry and his family frequently comments on the growing hotness and increasing temperature which indicates the dangerous effects of greenhouse gases and Global warming, due to rise in consumption and use of technological devises. The temperature seems to rise to the extent that it looks "unreal". Updike leads his readers to think over the effects of greenhouse gases they are emitting through their consumption.

Taken together, these passages establish the world of the novel as postnatural in Deitering's (1996) precise sense. Nature has not been removed from it; nature has been entered, altered and reproduced, so that what remains is available chiefly as effect. The sunshine looks manufactured, the water has changed colour, the green creation Harry remembers has become something he can describe only by naming what it used to be. The pastoral gesture of return is unavailable to him not because the natural world has disappeared but because what survives of it has been processed. This is why the novel can be environmentally serious while containing no wilderness and no scene of environmental confrontation.

Harry's visit to any public place makes him aware of the pollution and contamination of the world. In his trip to beach he finds the water "a dirtier green" and listen to "airplane..dragging its noise behind it" (Updike, 1990, p. 127). He feels the environment around him dying and fading into 'nothingness'. He notices the transformation of "God's green creation" to a decaying dirty gray nature by the effects of contamination, "it seems unreal, coated in a fake sunshine"(Updike, 1990, p. 160). The transformation renders him anxious about the consequences.

Updike criticizes modern man's pride on the technology and his 'know-it-all' tendency without any practicality. There is no end of information in the modern world but still no implication. Updike mocks modern man food fetish, modern man is aware that the artificial foodstuffs and fast foods are unhygienic but they do not stop buying them and eating them. Updike also mocks modern restaurants' manipulation of human beings to make their business flourish. These restaurants use attractive names and use healthy statements to attract conscious customers as Harry comments, "*Your local Lo-cal Eatery and Organic Fresh Food Health Dishes*, to attract the health minded yuppies" (Updike, 1990, p. 209).

Updike condemns the cultural implications of environmental pollution. American culture promotes materialism which is causing environmental deterioration. American culture is misrepresented as a way to success. American idea of complete freedom is utterly misleading American youth. American youth is becoming hard core drugs addict, and what they find in it is "instant happiness" but in actuality they are "soft lazy Americans". Harry

further comments on the drug addicted lot that “there are two routes to happiness. Work for it day after day or take a chemical short cut. With the world the way it is, these kids today take the short cut. The long way looks too long.” (Updike, 1990, p. 51).

4.2. The Slow and Reluctant Awakening

If the novel's representation of threat is distributed and undramatic, its representation of recognition is gradual and resisted. Buell's account of environmental awakening as slow, reluctant and finally horrified provides the most accurate description of what happens to Harry Angstrom across the novel, and the accuracy is worth dwelling on, because the process Updike depicts has a shape that a simple transfer of information would not possess. Harry does not learn that the world is contaminated. He notices, dismisses what he has noticed, notices again, and arrives only near the end at a recognition he can neither articulate nor act upon.

Updike warns people about the threat to the survival of human race by contamination of nature through the perspective and feelings of the protagonist. Harry frequently contemplates on his life and death, “Will he ever have a day again? Fifty-five and fading.”, as, “the hot sun is hurrying the life cycle along”. (Updike, 1990, p. 53). Updike has an undertone of educating people about the threats of natural forces due to the contamination of environment. The anxiety of Harry is the anxiety of all the Americans living in the contaminated world.

Updike has carefully described the changes taking place in the American world. He notes the rapid changes in the American lifestyles and especially in city life are the real cause of much disturbances. Harry keeps comparing the city life with past, “The city is quicker than he remembers it...buildings that he felt as a boy were widely spaced now appear adjacent.” (Updike, 1990, p. 168). By describing the details of the changes occurring in the modern American life, Updike wants to make people aware of the gross mistakes which they are doing under the veil of development and improvement of lifestyle. Updike has presented all the issues of contamination which are at work in modern world to make people aware of the responsibilities towards the nature so that they can play their part as members of the universal system.

Buell argues that one of the signs of contamination in the landscape is the sense of sudden realization about the threat of some calamity which he calls, “an awakening-sometimes slow and reluctant and a horrified realization that there is no protective environmental blanket, leaving one feeling dreadfully wronged” (Buell, 2009, p. 37). The changes which American lot is making is very dangerous for the environment. The more they are consuming the more they are coming under the danger of global warming. Anything may happen under any environmental disturbed situation. Modern man is under constant urgency of natural disasters. “The greenhouse effect, he thinks. The hole in the ozone. When the ice in Antarctica goes, we'll all be drowned.” (Updike, 1990, p. 336). The threat of natural hazards is always in the unconsciousness of modern man. It is very alarming situation that nature has started showing the signs of its destruction.

The awakening proceeds in identifiable stages. It begins with sensory registration: water the wrong colour, air that resists breathing, heat that exceeds expectation. It moves to speculation that the novel permits Harry to raise and then abandon, as when he wonders about the ozone and dismisses the thought as imagination. It reaches its decisive moment when he applies the observation to himself rather than to the world at large, recognising his own consumption as participation rather than as innocent appetite. What it never reaches is action. Buell's (2001) environmental unconscious accounts for the earlier stages, in which perception operates without interpretation; it does not account for the final one, in which interpretation arrives complete and changes nothing.

Harry gradually comes to realize his role in the contamination of the environment. The more he analyses nature the more he becomes aware of the contamination. While he plays the role of Uncle Sam to fulfill the wish of his granddaughter, he comes to realization that his "body is eating enough at one meal to feed three Ethiopians for a day, a shameless consumer" (Updike, 1990, p. 345). He frequently contemplates on the thoughts of environmental contamination and Americans role in it, which makes him feel doomed. His moral code does not allow him to think outside his own self but at the end of the novel he consciously thinks over the realization of his self that is adjacent to the environment. "The threat of the poisoned world" keep him feeling trapped in the world. The modern world demand more sacrifices on the parts of its inhabitants as compared to the past, because modern world has contaminated the nature more than any other era.

The environmental threats today are the evidences of human beings exploitation of the nature from ages, most significantly from the last century. The threats which are now encircling our lives in this world are making us understand the extent of destruction done to the environment, "coming down makes you realize how high up you usually are. God, he says, it'll be good to get back to the *real* world." (Updike, 1990, p. 145). Updike's gloomy description of the modern landscape makes people aware about the seriousness of the problems. Human beings now must take a step towards the betterment of the nature.

Updike has presented the emptiness within human beings due to the distance from nature. Harry at the end of his life develop an empathizing bond with nature, but quite ironically, he does not stop the destruction of nature through his activities. At the end of the novel, as well as his life, Harry feels for the nature around him, "In his mood of isolation and lassitude he is drawing closer to the earth, the familiar mother with his infancy still in her skirts, in the shadow beneath the bushes." (Updike, 1990, p. 359). Harry starts noticing the decay of his existence with the decay of nature.

Harry gradually realizes that human beings have made this Earth a 'barren land' or "artificially lit place" which is hollow inside, the nature is totally 'fake' and 'unreal' now. Human beings have contaminated earth to that extent that now it cannot be regained in the same state. Harry in a rather pessimistic outlook views the world, with no sign of betterment left yet he hopes for the future of mankind. Updike has presented a bleak picture of modern world through his novel. The materialistic outlook which started with the

Industrialization and mechanization of the human life, has made this world a contaminated place.

Once Rabbit confesses to a clergyman that “somewhere behind all this there’s something that wants me to find it.” And to this Updike remarks, “ Whatever it is, it now has found *him*, and is working him over.” (Updike, 1990, p. 122). It is the realization of the harm done to the world under the veil of development. Harry gradually undergoes the process of contamination of the world. He indulges in the environmental damaging activities. He becomes a symbol for whole America, indulgent in the process of the contamination of the world. Updike presents a critical stance of Harry Angstrom, to modern man in order to make him aware and self conscious about the environmental problems.

4.3. Constructing Consciousness Without Advocacy

The third concern of this study is the novel's operation upon its reader, and here Updike's refusal of advocacy requires examination rather than apology. A novel that depicts environmental threat this extensively while declining to argue about it appears, on first reading, to waste its own material. The argument developed here is the opposite: that the refusal constitutes the method, and that the consciousness the novel builds is more durable for having been assembled by the reader rather than delivered to him.

Updike's Rabbit novels are a good example of the Literature spreading consciousness about the environmental threats, as each novel is a commentary on a decade. Each novel of the Rabbit series presents a critical view of the happenings in each decade from 1960 to onwards. *Rabbit at Rest* is masterpiece of Updike. This novel shows the end of Twentieth century and criticizes the malpractices of human beings in modern era. Updike has not dealt with the problem of environmental destruction by directly stating the facts and figures of the environmental disasters, rather he has presented a picture of the gradually decaying world to his modern readers. What makes his effort significant is the fact that he has commented on almost every aspect of environmental destruction in modern era.

Many “conscious minds” as Deitering calls, started depicting the threat of environmental collapse in their works, John Updike is one of such conscious minded writers. Updike has tried to make people aware about the environmental threats which are happening or are likely to happen due to their careless attitude towards nature. Literature of any culture has a great impact on the psyche of its people. It can change the attitudes of its people. And in the case of environmental issues, most of the people are not yet aware of the implications of this threat and in this situation Literature can do a significant work. The writer allows his readers to see and criticize the world from his perspective and hence without doing any offence the writer can point out the short comings of the people. In the modern world the environmental problems need to change the attitudes of people, which can best be possible through Literature.

Updike does not aim to give any solution to the problems of the environmental issues, rather his approach is quite objective and open ended. He leaves the matter to the reader to make the judgement and change his behavior. But he describes the problem with much accurate detail and excellence. His style is not didactic or of giving sermons like a priest, rather he just makes people aware about the ill practices of everyday activities. He has shunned the veil of ignorance from the eyes of modern man about the so-called happy, prosperous America and has presented a gross reality to them. He has describes the reason of restlessness and anxiety in people of America as well as all human beings of modern era.

Updike's selection of a 'unheroic kind of hero' is quite appropriate. He has chosen an ordinary middle class male with all the desires and dreams of American luxurious life. Harry mostly live in his own shell without bothering about any other person or any other matter, which is applicable to whole of the American lot. They all live inside their own shels, without thinking about anything but themselves. Their only focus is their own selves and their present situation. They are devoid of any moral or spiritual bonding with any person or any phenomenon.

The mechanism is a transfer of interpretive labour. Because the narration remains close to a protagonist who cannot analyse what he perceives, every connection the novel implies must be completed by someone outside it. Harry observes the refuse on the beach; the reader recognises a culture legible through what it discards. Harry registers the heat; the reader supplies the atmospheric explanation Harry lacks. Harry eats what he has been told will kill him; the reader understands the relation between appetite, industry and ecological harm that Harry never formulates. An argued position may be accepted or refused, but a recognition the reader has assembled unaided is harder to set aside, because it arrives as the reader's own conclusion rather than as the author's instruction.

Updike's *Rabbit at Rest* presents the critical issue of environmental destruction to the masses in a way that it affect people. Updike is a conscious writer of his age presenting all the major trends of his age in a convincing manner. He highlights the attitudes of people towards the realization that environment is in danger. He has presented the agony in human beings due to the realization of environmental decay through the character of Harry. His protagonist, Harry through his actions becomes a symbol of a sad consumer society which gradually comes to end its own life due to its own damaging acts.

Updike has shown that human beings are ignorant creatures. They are full of "crazy impulses" which made them blind in the pursuit of wealth and prosperity that they forget about the environmental damages that can ruin their lives and their existence in this Earth. Updike wants to direct people to the path of nature and health. His criticism on the modern practices of getting maximum profit, is a step towards the expected betterment of society. He has presented the ugly picture of human beings who have gone too far in the pursuit of material things that they have forgotten their true self and their origin in this world.

Eco-criticism condemns the acceptance of the contaminated environment in the modern world. Updike has painted a picture of American life which has decided to live with the contamination of the environment around themselves. Harry and his family has adopted the way of life which is full of contamination in America, as everybody else in the world. They are living in “a little, enclosed climate, a burrow of precise circumstance that Harry gradually adjusts to” (Updike, 1990, p. 115). Buell argues that these environmental destructive standards should not be accepted in the society. Environmental destruction should not come to the point of ‘normalcy’ for the human beings.

This is also why the novel's pessimism does not defeat its purpose. Updike declines to show recognition producing reform, and the decline is honest rather than despairing. Harry achieves understanding and continues as before, which establishes that awareness is necessary and insufficient at once. A novel that concluded with its protagonist reformed would have proposed a relation between knowing and acting that the evidence does not support. By refusing that consolation, Updike leaves the work of closing the gap where it actually belongs, outside the book.

The consciousness of the ‘problems of the environment’ alone can help to sustain human survival in the world. We need to develop a ‘toxic consciousness’ among ourselves which will enable us to view and condemn everything or every activity damaging for the environment. The road to betterment leads through this ‘toxic consciousness’ of the people about the threats of contamination of the natural landscape. Every individual should play his part in the betterment and sustenance of the nature, because there is no substitute for the nature. Human beings now need to stop environmental injustice.

Updike's *Rabbit at Rest* has presented the problem of worldwide consumerism and the ways in which it is harming environment and causing threat for the survival of human race. Updike has painted a picture of the modern world, gradually decaying due to the malpractices of its inhabitants. He has critically debated the effect of environmental deterioration to the attitudes and health of modern man. Updike has showed the modern man his gross mistakes in a hope to make them ‘conscious’ about them.

5. Conclusion

This study set out to examine how *Rabbit at Rest* represents environmental threat, how it traces the emergence of ecological consciousness within its protagonist, and how it constructs such consciousness in the reader without recourse to advocacy. The analysis supports a single conclusion across all three concerns: Updike builds environmental understanding through accumulation rather than assertion, and the method succeeds precisely because it withholds the interpretation it invites.

In response to the first question, the novel represents environmental threat as the ordinary condition of American life rather than as exceptional hazard. Contaminated water, air that resists breathing, refuse scattered across a public beach, chemicals present in the most domestic articles, an altered climate remarked upon in conversation about the weather these are the materials from which the novel's world is built. Buell's four elements

of toxic discourse are all present: the remembered green world measured against a commercial present, the contamination understood as admitting no refuge, the industrial and cultural forces beyond any individual's power to confront, and the failing body upon which the abstract finally becomes undeniable. No single passage carries the weight of environmental statement; the argument exists only in the aggregate.

In response to the second question, the novel traces an awakening that conforms closely to Buell's description of the process as slow and reluctant. Harry's environmental recognition arrives in fragments and against resistance. He notices the dirtier water and the noise of aircraft, wonders about the ozone and then dismisses the thought as imagination, observes the garbage without drawing conclusions from it, and comes only gradually to perceive his own part in what he has been watching. The awakening is genuine and incomplete, and the refusal to complete it is deliberate. Harry arrives at empathy with the natural world in his final months while continuing the consumption destroying both him and it.

In response to the third question, the novel constructs ecological consciousness in the reader through a transfer of interpretive labour. Because the protagonist cannot analyse what he perceives, the connections the novel implies must be made by someone else, and that someone is necessarily the reader. Harry notices the litter; the reader recognises a culture legible through its refuse. Harry wonders about the air; the reader supplies the atmospheric science he lacks. Harry eats what is killing him after being told it will; the reader understands the relationship between appetite, industry and ecological harm that Harry never formulates. This is why the absence of advocacy functions as method rather than evasion. An argued position can be accepted or refused; a recognition the reader has assembled unaided is harder to set down. Deitering's account of toxic consciousness as assumed rather than announced describes exactly this operation.

A further implication follows, and it is uncomfortable. The novel's protagonist achieves recognition and it changes nothing whatever. He understands, accurately and in detail, and continues exactly as before until the understanding kills him. If the novel is read as environmental education, it educates toward a bleak conclusion: that awareness is necessary and manifestly insufficient, and that the gap between knowing and acting is not a deficiency of information. This finding has grown more rather than less relevant in the decades since the novel appeared, since the intervening period has supplied environmental information in quantities Harry never possessed without producing the transformation such information was expected to compel.

Certain limitations should be acknowledged. The study examines a single novel and does not trace environmental perception across the tetralogy. Its claims about the novel's effect upon readers are analytical rather than empirical, derived from narrative technique rather than reception evidence. Further research might test such claims against actual reader response, or extend the framework to other reticent realists of the period.

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