

The Passive Effects of Modernity in Saunders' Novel Fox 8

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Abstract

Modernity and development despite of having positive impacts, they also have significant negative effects on nature and animals that lead to ecological imbalance, loss of biodiversity and the extinction of organisms that cannot adapt to rapid changes.

In ancient times, man was confined by nature and tried to adapt it, whereas in the modern era he has begun to influence and change it. Though, this action has positive aspects in improving his living conditions and keeping pace with development, it has many drawbacks for making nature a victim of man's behavior. Nature is currently experiencing continuous degradation due to man misconduct, increase deliberate and unintentional encroachments upon it.

Urban expansion, as one of modernity's facet is distinctly man's matter; the increase in population, the migration of farmers, and the shrinking of agricultural land are objective consequences of man's intervention in nature and forcing it to submit to his will. In order to change the environment according to modernity and the use of technology, man begins to cut down forest trees and turn the lands into factories and homes.

It is evident, that any disruption to the balance that God Almighty created in this environment of land, air, or water, which we call pollution results from violence against nature, which affects all the creatures that live in it, including not only the animals, plantings but humans as well.

Key words: animals, technology, nature, development, urban expansion

الأثار السلبية للحدثة في رواية سوندرز "الثعلب 8"

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المستخلص:

على الرغم من أن للحدثة والتنمية آثاراً إيجابية، إلا أن لهما أيضاً آثاراً سلبية كبيرة على الطبيعة والحيوانات، مما يؤدي إلى اختلال التوازن البيئي، وفقدان التنوع البيولوجي، وانقراض الكائنات الحية التي لا تستطيع التكيف مع التغيرات السريعة.

في العصور القديمة، كان الإنسان مقيداً بالطبيعة ويحاول التكيف معها، بينما في العصر الحديث بدأ يؤثر فيها ويغيرها. ومع ذلك، فإن لهذا الفعل جوانب إيجابية في تحسين ظروف معيشته ومواكبة التطور، ينطوي ذلك على العديد من السلبيات، إذ يجعل الطبيعة ضحية لسلوك الإنسان. وتشهد الطبيعة حالياً تدهوراً مستمراً نتيجة لسوء سلوك الإنسان، وتزايد التعداد المتعمدة وغير المتعمدة عليها.

يُعد التوسع الحضري، باعتباره أحد جوانب الحدثة، شأناً بشرياً بامتياز؛ فزيادة عدد السكان، وهجرة المزارعين، وتقلص الأراضي الزراعية، كلها نتائج موضوعية لتدخل الإنسان في الطبيعة وإجبارها على الخضوع لإرادته. من أجل تغيير البيئة وفقاً للحدثة واستخدام التكنولوجيا، بدأ الإنسان بقطع أشجار الغابات وتحويل الأراضي إلى مصانع ومنازل.

من الواضح أن أي خلل في التوازن الذي خلقه الله القدير في هذه البيئة من الأرض أو الهواء أو الماء، والذي نسميه التلوث ينتج عن عنف ضد الطبيعة، مما يؤثر على جميع المخلوقات التي تعيش فيها، بما في ذلك ليس فقط الحيوانات والنباتات ولكن البشر أيضاً.

الكلمات المفتاحية: لحيوانات، التكنولوجيا، الطبيعة، التنمية، التوسع الحضري

1.Introduction

Man is considered the most influential living organisms in causing changes to the environment and disrupting the natural and biological balance. As time has passed, man has increased his control and dominance

over the environment, especially after scientific and technological advancements that provided him with many opportunities.

Although technology has facilitated many daily tasks and contributed to the development of humanity, nature is paying the price for this technological development. Among the most prominent negative effects of technology on the environment is the destruction of plant and animal habitats, the clearing of forests and wooded areas just to build factories and mills as Calarco avers (2014, 2014: 60).

Some human activities that cause harm and pose some problems directly or indirectly to the environment are the deforestation and the construction of residential buildings. Human as a part of ecosystem has negative impacts on the environment and therefore affects the functions of this system through his various activities, as incorrect human practices contribute to disrupting its resilience. This is achieved through the extinction of many species as they find no place that can provide them with food, security and shelter.

The impact of modernity and urban expansion on reducing green spaces, leads to the destruction and the fragmentation of animals 'natural habitats causing the losing of their native habitats. Many literary works shed light on the passive effects of modernity and urban expansion upon nature for it is the main reason of destroying the beauty and the innocence of life. Among those writer is George Saunders whose main concern is to protect nature through attacking the means used to build new factories and buildings regardless the demolition caused to nature. It is obvious that urban expansion poses a significant challenge to natural environments; this expansion leads to the "removal of large areas of natural land for

residential and industrial projects, directly impacting surrounding ecosystems” (Gogniat, 2007: 18).

2. Dark Ecology’s Theory

Dark ecology, a theory by Timothy Morton (1968-), a British-American philosopher is considered a division of modern eco-criticism. It is defined as “an ecological awareness, dark-depressing that rejects the separation of human/nonhuman worlds and enhances the interconnectedness between them” (Morton, 2007: 5). This theory portrays nature as impure in order to support the ecological closeness as Morton concentrates on his idea that there is a sturdy relationship between human and nature; refusing the outdated views that no close relationship between them. For him, the absence of separation between human / nature is due to the deepened relationship between them since long time and the effect of each one upon the other.

Unfortunately, modernity affects passively the relationship between human and nature as human seeks to achieve the development on the account of destroying nature and its creatures. Being a dominant on nature, human destroys everything that hinder his progress regardless the harm he causes for others.

Morton seeks to enhance the relationship of human/ nature for they cannot dispense from each other as any incorrect or bad act will affect nature passively and causes the suffering of the nature’s creatures specifically the animals who due to nature destruction, find no place, shelter, food and security (Morton, 2007: 10).

3. Fox/ Nature Relationship

George Saunders (1958-) a well-known American writer has a typical way of writing that mixing irony, comedy and deep human visions. Through his novel *Fox 8* (2013) he used the fox's voice to mix both comic and sorrow as the fox tells his adventure and struggle among the human infringing danger of destroying his forest. The fox's suffering echoes the author's idea that there must be a balance between progress and protection never forgetting the human effect on the natural world (Chairani and etal., 2019: 21).

The plot of this novel is based on a Fox named 8 who narrates his specific events in his life. At the beginning he tries learning to speak, read and write the human language as for many nights he sits outside a human house and through the opened window he can listen to a mother reading stories to her children. He decides to tell his friend Fox 7 about his new skills; later to the pack leader. The human starts to destroy the foxes' forest in order to build a shopping mall, so the foxes have no other source of food consequently, the foxes become starved and the elderly foxes died. Fox 8 becomes depressed and orders all the foxes to stay in one place. It is obvious, that the story itself is a letter written by the fox8 to human who destroys everything in his life.

This novel is narrated with a sentimental quality that arouses pity and sadness. The narrator is a special, dreamy and curious fox that his curiosity pushed him to hide outside a house and listen to a children bedtime stories narrated by their mother in order to learn how to speak Yuman, meaning human language. The author 's main concern is to reveal the destruction of animals' natural homes and their death because of human's destroying forests and building instead of them shopping malls.

Through the fox's eyes, he portrays human as a cruel and enemy of nature (Evans, 2005: 2). For the fox, the words' influence and the stories built from them are so hard with graceful emotion but there is a danger; the building of a new mall will cause the cutting off his food supply. So, he decides desperately to search for a new place in suburb just to save himself and his follow foxes.

Being a daydreaming fox, his imagination incites him to listen to a tender human voice, a mother reading to her children when he is passing a window. He used to do the same thing several times; the result is not only learning how to speak human language but how to read and write as well. His first written passage is:

Deer Reeder:

First may I say, sorry for any werds I spel rong. Because I am a fox! So don't rite or spel perfect. But here is how I lerned to rite and spel as gud as I do (Saunders, 2013: 23).

Despite of having no direct contact with human, the fox idealized his first relationship with and starts seeking "what mite somewhat retreev the old and hope full me" (Saunders: 28). To free his mind, confirm goodness and hope, he adds:

When done, she wud dowse the lite, causing dark. Then, due to feeling "luv," wud bend down, putting snout and lips to the heds of her pups, which was called: "gudnite kiss." Which I got a kik out of that! Because that is also how we show our luv for our pups, as Foxes! It made me feel gud, like Yumans cud feel luv and show luv. In other werds, hope full for the future of Erth! (Saunders: 35).

This speech shows his deep love for this human family and even he dreams going with the baby to the school. He is honestly kind at heart never deserved to be homeless or killed as he is innocent to human brutality and his hard attempts to communicate with human through this language in

order to confirm his innocence and hope to live peacefully with human in this modern world (Mathew and etal., 2020: 6).

Fox 8 becomes disappointed with humanity and later with life in general when he sees some trucks cutting the trees; “Terns out, it cud not eat us. It cud not chase us. But what it cud do, was even werse” (Saunders: 41) in order to build a mall. Such an act increases the animals’ pain, hurt as their habitat will be destroyed and they will suffer from starving; “Now hold on a minute. I was wary at this point, too” (Saunders: 45).

For several times, Fox 8 hears these two phrases “shopping mall and residential development” (Saunders: 48) that are not familiar yet worryingly impactful to his realm. Building the mall does not cause Fox 8 to lose his hope, rather it makes him sees the human’s real brutality, saying:

“I had herd so many Storys at that window but never had I herd a Story in which anything [. . . *trailing off to avoid spoilers*]” He wanders and thinks, “Why did the Curator do it so rong, making the groop with the gratest skils the meenest?” (Saunders: 52).

Being a good fox never deserves to be polluted as his shock causes his loss of innocence:

“I know life can be gud. Most lee it is gud. I have drank cleen cold water on a hot day, herd the soft bark of the one I luv, watched sno fall slow, making the wuds kwiet. But now all these happy sites and sounds seem like triks. Now it seems like the gud times are mere lee smoke that, upon blowing away, here is the reel life, which is: rok hats, kikking, stomping. Every minit with no kikking and stomping now seems like not a real minit (Saunders 55).

Both Fox 8 and Fox 7 realize that they will all die for having no foods. So they decide to enter the mall searching for food regardless the

dangerous risk they might face. The size and complexity of the mall make them frightened but their fears are disappeared when some people give them food. Both Fox 8 and Fox 7 have been fascinated by the mall and its wonders: “a floor like glass, fake rocks, real trees, the Gap, a carousel, and best of all, a Food Court!”(Saunders: 76) . They take the food and in a moment of leaving the mall, they meet two workers who attack them and kill Fox 7 whereas Fox 8 can escape.

“.....suddenly,” Fox 8 tells of his friend’s demise, “his neck goes week, and he gives me one last fond look, and drops over on his side, with blood trickling out his snout... and what could I do but flee?” Why did God do it so wrong, making the group with the greatest skills the meanest?(Saunders: 62).

Regrettably, Fox 8 cannot save his friend whose death shocked and disturbed him. Moreover, his pack is no longer existed in the same place; therefore he begins to wander away from his own place. Despite of roving for many days, he doesn’t find his pack.

During his roving, he sees many examples of human civilization makes him wonder about the reasons that human who is the most powerful species appeared to be the most destructive one. His ability to experience happiness has been damaged because of the hurtful event he faced. Despite of the gloomy atmosphere that dominates Fox 8’s life, there is a hint of hope as he finds a lively forest and healthy foxes. He feels happy to stay with them specifically when a female asks him to make a family. His happiness cannot erase from his mind the suffering and gloominess he experienced previously. To live a good future and feel better, Fox 8 decides to fight against his misery by writing a letter to human in order to get some explanation from him concerning his damaging and aggressive acts. In his letter he writes:

“man encroaches on the forest where he and his fellow foxes abide and Fox 8 is first distracted by the wonders of a newly

built 'Mawl' and then forced to find a new way of life. As you'd expect from Saunders, it's a cry of outrage about the state of the world and what we're doing to it, albeit gussied up in words that make you look at the world afresh" (Saunders: 71).

As a dreamer, Fox 8 dreams have been increased due to his close observation of human. But at the moment of despair he has just related what happened when he spent a day exploring a mall with his good friend Fox 7. Forgetting for a moment that the construction of the mall had resulted in the loss of the foxes' habitat, polluted their river, killed the fish, and flattened the hilltops from which the foxes could previously see all of creation.

The difficult circumstances around the foxes make them confront the severe reality of survival in unfriendly world. They have to risk themselves to secure their main necessities that become so rare such as food and shelter. Fox 8 is the first one who witnesses not only the human act progress but also his cruel act against nature.

This novel is about the greed and destruction of the American landscape (Preston, 2018: 22). As a matter of fact, the building of the mall has two meanings; for the human as a dominator, it means development whereas for the foxes as victims, it symbolizes destruction. It later can be associated with "starvation, death, and relocation" (Budi, 2018: 298) specifically for those that are affected by the powerful human conducts.

The construction of the mall changes the forest completely. Instead of peace, tranquility and natural order, the forest turns to be a place filled with noises, strange smell and chaos. It devoid of green scenery as all the trees cut down. Though, the building of the mall reflects the modernity, at the same time destroys the natural beauty that cannot be replaced by artificial beauty as Williams Raymond points out (10). Unfortunately, the

forest changed to be a barren and desolate place since everything is ruined, no shelters, no food sources and even the foxes 'safe refuges are collapsed.

“Developers cut down the wood and Fox has to flee, through the landscapes of mawls and rodes ... It's a story that can and will be read by children, but it's also a book of deep complex truths (Preston 2018).

All these bad things happened as consequences of human development that turns the flourishing ecosystem to be a fragmented and aggressive environment. The dominant sound that is heard in the forest is the strict sound of machine that replaced the sounds of birds cheeping and the leaves rustling. This intensifies that animals are exiled and the forest is completely disturbed.

For Saunders, the weakness leads to indecision, anxiety and fear whereas power causes suffering:

“soon here came trucks, smoking wile tooting! They dug up our Primary Forest! They tore out our Leaning Tree! They rekked our shady drinking spot, and made total lee flat the highest plase of which we know, from where we can see all of curashun if it is not raning! (Saunders: 10-11).

It is evident that Saunders is not against modernity but against any act that shake the stability of other creatures in this modern world; meaning the animals. Hence, there is no doubt that the urban sprawl of cities has negative consequences, including the obliteration of agricultural lands and the environment for animals.

4. Kindness and Cruelty

There is a similarity between cruelty towards animals and violence towards humans. Both victims are living beings who feel pain and sorrow, endure hardship and suffering, and may die from injuries and harm.

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Cruelty and abuse towards animals signify a lack of respect for the right to life in such a horrible modern world.

The author sheds light on the necessity of kindness and the destructive effects of cruelty. Through the character of Fox 8, the author shows various examples of kindness and unselfishness. After the forest's destruction, Fox 8 decides to risk himself by going to the mall in order to bring foods for his friends as their starving increases his sense of responsibility and pushes him venture himself though no other foxes accept to go. Fox 8 takes the risk upon himself, for their sakes: "and sinse I luv you, shud I not do my best to save you? Hense I desided to go alone" (Saunders: 23).

The forest symbolizes the goodness and rescuing qualities of life. His living with other foxes in a forest provides Fox 8 with the sense of love and community. Although the human destroys his forest, still it represents the irrepressible conditions may damage a pleasing place. On the other hand, the mall symbolizes the tangled nature of both human's goodness and defects. The first time Fox 8 enters the mall, he admires the human's ability of creating such a great and multifaceted place. He also becomes so happy when people give him foods. This intensifies that the mall is not only an element of destruction but a system of capital that may damage poor people as Garrard remarks (2004: 10).

According to Fox 8, the mother's stories that he used to hear and through it he can learn how to speak the human language symbolize sympathy saying:

"I herd.....the most amazing sound. Turns out, what that sound is, was: the Yuman voice, making werds. They sounded grate! They sounded like pretty music!

(Saunders: 31).

Being a narrator and the protagonist of the story, Fox 8 intends only to live peacefully in his forest with other foxes. For this reason, he starts to repeat the mother's words; here the narrative creates a thematic emphasis on importance of words and stories. He adds that:

“One lesson I learned during my nights at that Yuman window was: a good writer will make the reader feel as bad as the Yuman does in their story...If you want to feel as bad as we foxes are feeling at this time: (1) bare lee eat for weeks, (2) note that many friends, including.....” (Saunders: 44).

But, he apologizes to the reader for speaking non-understood and misspelled words; starting his letter by telling the reader the ways he has learnt human language.

The deep sense of pain and hurt dominate Fox 8's life as he has lost everything, home, friends and security. In other words, his entire life is shaped by complete tragedies. His sense of sadness and regret is not only for the loss of his close friend Fox 7 but also of feeling responsibility of his death. One day, while walking through the forest, he hears some animals talk optimistically about life but he feels not. He laments the fact that the brilliant human is capable of creating marvelous homes is also so painful to others, namely the animals.

The author's main concern is to reveal the misery and suffering of unspeakable creatures; animals due to the destructive and cruel acts of human against them. Moreover, he seeks to show the destructive and massive effects of human brutality against those innocent animals, in time as civilized human should protect and treat them with sympathy.

According to Huggan (2015: 6), human must realize that animals share this world with him; hence, his responsibility is to protect and to stop any brutal action towards them. Obviously, Saunders attracts the attention of the people to see carefully the passive and dangerous effect of their horrible and violent acts against the animals. This exposes clearly through portraying the most horrifying image that is the stoning of Fox7 just for amusing “further hits with their hats, and kits and stomps, while making adishunal noises (additional). I had never herd (heard) a Yuman (Human) make, as if this is fun” (Saunders: 31).

The human's violent act is revealed clearly through the two men in the mall. They start to hit both Fox 8 and Fox 7 who injured and died for having no way to escape while Fox 8 can run away but with horrible feeling of seeing the suffering of his close friend Fox 7 who died due to the violent and heartless act of those men. He is completely disappointed after checking his close friend's dead body. Fox 8 is astonished and worried for seeing the human's excessive vicious act. For him, it is so difficult to forget such a horrible event; he neither could eat nor sleep well for finding no justification of killing innocent being just to make fun (Saunders: 61).

To recover from his tremor, sadness and the difficulty of forgetting such a horrible event, Fox 8 needs long time. But, after finding a new place that full of trees, flowers with other animals, he begins to think of new life and friends; planning to write a letter to the human. It is not an ordinary letter; on the contrary, it is a type of questions, wonders, mourning and advices. In this letter, he tells the humans about all the horrible acts against animals, saying:

“If you Yumans wud take one bit of advise from a meer Fox? By now I know that you Yumans like your storys to

end happy? If you want your story to end happy, try being nicer” (Saunders: 48-49).

For him, these words are not enough as at the end of the letter adds that he waits the answer from the human; leaving the letter under the bird feeder and wishing to receive the reply. The most attractive advice Fox 8 has written “if you want to be happy, be nice” (Saunders: 55), here the author concentrates on living peacefully in modern world without harming each other as there must be mutual relationship between human / nonhuman.

In his letter, Fox 8 explains the ruins, troubles and destruction caused by human’s progress. He describes the way his home, forest change to be lifeless place because of unimpeded buildings. His plea concentrates on the importance of sympathy; begging human to reconsider his acts for the survival of other creatures. Moreover, he tells the anguish of losing his friend Fox 7 and the suffering of other foxes that either scattered or killed. He clarifies that all bad things happened to them are due to the violation of human habitats. In his plea, he doesn’t only want to save his kind but to arouse in human a sense of responsibility towards all living creatures (Budi: 119). Both, human and foxes can live in this world peacefully through adopting empathy and accepting the existence of others.

To compare Fox 8 with other foxes, he is completely different for his ability to understand and talk the human language. His curiosity pushes him to be near a human home to listen and gradually interpreting the complex meaning of the words. Therefore, he becomes not only an observer of human’s acts but an interpreter of his conduct as well. For Fox 8, to enter the human’s world, knowing his habits and relations, understanding his complexity, compassion and contradiction are all done through his learning human’s language.

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Fox 8 is captivated by human's stories and starts to compare between both his kindness and meanness; realizing that his actions deviated from the simplicity of his own existence in a wild world that gradually destroyed by human's modern world (Williams: 16). He feels wretched for losing his peaceful, lovely and prosperous world as solid woods provide them with foods and safe shelter. In fact, all the foxes live as one family and they are closely connected with strong relationships that marked by an intense sense of community and helping each other.

When a child looks at Fox 8 with wonder and kindness, this short moment affects Fox 8 and reminds him of human 'complexity who changes nature into an uncongenial landscape of machines. In such landscape, there is no refuge and nutrition provided by the trees since they all felled and replaced by high new buildings. It is evident that unstoppable human expansion affects the fox, his family and friends passively as the sight of lifeless dominates them, obviously they become victims because of the humane absence.

The death of his close friend Fox7 still affects him painfully, yet Fox 8 tries hardly to be strong for the sake of the surviving the other foxes; realizing the reality that the dependency on a world is no longer support or protect them. In fact, not only the foxes suffer from the human's development but definitely many animals. Therefore, the author seeks to awake the human about the importance of evaluating the beauty and significance of every creature in this world. Harmonious relationship with nature is something cannot compensate by other things. According to Saunders, Fox 8 is mentally lost (Saunders: 33) for facing and experiencing horrible events due to human's unkindness that wrecked every beautiful thing in his life.

The natural identity of the forest is damaged and changed into a man-made habitat. Not only the trees but all other resources are demolished just for one limited purpose to human. This reflects the human's brutality in damaging anything other than himself to achieve his egotistical development; "Selfishness and greed are often conveniently portrayed as innate human characteristics" (Jones, 2014: 22).

The animals' habitat was destroyed for building the mall that makes human happy regardless the sorrow and sadness caused to other creatures. Fox 8, other foxes and animals become victims of the human forced power to build the mall by relocating the inhabitants and exploiting the environment; "the ideology of domination and subjugation of the environment, of indifference to the harm caused in pursuit of economic growth and of support for established harmful practices (Mathew and etal., 2020: 12).

We must be wary of all forms of abuse and aggression towards any living being, as it is an unacceptable act that endangers everyone. Abusing and assaulting animals is a type of cruelty and savagery, and an indicator of aggressive and antisocial behavior. Therefore, it is essential not only to be wary of it but to prevent it in order to avoid the spread of violence against anyone in society whether human or animals.

Conclusion

The surrounding includes nature, water, air, living organisms like animals is the place where human lives and carries out his various activities. Nature specifically has long been a source of inspiration for many writers. Therefore, the connection between human and nature is a reality that cannot be ignored, regardless of human's industrial and technological advancements. The relationship which encapsulates this connection can be understood from the beginning of life to the present day.

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In his novel *Fox 8*, Saunders highlights the importance of preserving nature for being the primary source of life to all living creatures. Through sustainability and awareness, human can benefit from nature's advantages without destroying it. Human's duty and responsibility is to protect nature through achieving a balance between it and his needs without using devastation means.

After hearing the building of mall instead of his forest, Fox 8 decides to learn the language of human in order to send a letter awaking human of his horrible act that causing starving, homeless and even death to the animals. Moreover, he risks his life by going to the mall searching for food to the foxes. From this point, Saunders confirms his idea that the development of several technologies without considering nature definitely is of great influence that might be passive. Thus, it is essential to preserve it and reconcile with development, given its close connection to the lives of humans, animals, and plants. Unfortunately, nature is destroyed at the hand of human who prefers artificial things instead of natural ones. The author emphasizes his idea that modernity should never give us the right to destroy others life specifically unspoken creatures. Hence, we must work to raise environmental awareness and educate people about the importance of maintaining ecological balance and providing a healthy and safe environment for both humans/animals.

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