



World of Culture Changes when Nature becomes our Teacher: An Eco-Critical Approach to the Movie *Barbie of Swan Lake*

Ms S. Kogila¹, PhD. Scholar in English Literature, Department of English, School of Arts, Sciences and Humanities, SASTRA Deemed to be University, Thanjavur.

Dr Sujatha A Menon, Research Supervisor, Senior Assistant Professor, Department of English, School of Arts, Sciences and Humanities, SASTRA Deemed to be University, Thanjavur.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5188-5863>¹

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Abstract

*“Nature never did betray The Heart that Loved her” as William Wordsworth said nature holds the power of Love, harmony, and prosperity. As we see, it changes the shape but at last, it will teach us the reality. As a teacher and a mother, Nature never separates us; as a child and students, they are doing as they wish. But nature has its way to teach or guiding the right path for beings. Once upon a time, this bond between the teacher(nature) and the student communities (humans, non-humans) was beautiful and fruitful. This fruit-bearing season changes when human moves toward rationality. “a commitment to rationalism, the view that reason (or rationality) is not only the hallmark of being human; it is what makes humans superior to nonhuman animals and nature (Warren 2009)” but the battle never be drawn. The wisest and noblest teacher never fails to win and teaches in the same way nature wins the match as well as teaches the Human. In this paper, the researcher attempts to bring out the characteristics of Nature as a teacher in all aspects through the movie *Barbie of Swan Lake* (2003) directed by Owen Hurley. This nature class happens in the Forest, a library of all creatures. Thus, this paper portrays the place of Peace, Wisdom, and Love and illustrates, “Let Nature be our teacher” through the characters from the forest such as Fairy Queen, Elves, and Unicorn. Through this, the forest teaches us the quality of being to Odette, Daniel and their Families- the representatives of Human beings.*

Keywords: Forest, Human as a Rationalist, Nature, Teacher.

Introduction - Owen Haley's *Barbie of Swan Lake*

This is the third movie of the Barbie series, released on September 30, 2003. It was directed by Owen Hurley and written by Elana Lesser along with Cliff Ruby. This 81-minute movie was telecast on Nickelodeon from November 16, 2003, onwards. It is mentioned as Fantasy, Romance and Adventure. But this paper attempts to trace the element of Eco-Criticism in this movie. In general, the protagonist of any movie would be male or female same as in the case of *Barbie of Swan Lake*. Odette, a beautiful young girl who is the protagonist of the movie chases a majestic unicorn named Lila into the enchanted forest. She is supposed to pick up a magic crystal which ultimately transforms her into a saviour of the



enchanted forest. She asserts that she is unfit for doing the job. She is about to move to the forest, and Rothbart, an evil wizard changes her into a swan. But she can regain herself after the sunset with the magic crystal given by the Fairy Queen. She vows to save the forest from Rothbart. In the meantime, love is cherished between Odette and Prince Daniel. Finally, her intelligence and the powerful bond of love between Odette and Prince Daniel be the strongest weapon for defeating Rothbart.

Nature as a Teacher of Odette

Odette is a young girl who loves dancing. She dances even while baking. But she is not as brave as her sister to do what she wants or loves. She represents many girls' dreams of contemporary society. Like men, women also have wishes to make in their life but they are afraid or afraid of some cultural norms.

Like in India, women have to quit their job after marriage as she holds a lot of responsibilities as a mother, daughters-in-law, and wife. Due to these many badges, women tend to lose their own identity by themselves as well as by society.

This identity crisis is shown in many places as Odette fails to prove her role in the given places. At first, she refused to dance at the ball even though her father asked her to do so:

Father: "Odette, you're a wonderful dancer you should go to the village, and dances with your sister"

Odette: "...and have everybody stare at me. I...I couldn't" (Swan Lake 04.24-29).

To her sister, she refused to come out for riding on the horses:

Marie: "come on I'm heading out again, you'll love it."

Odette: "thanks... but!"

Marie: "no thanks, right?"

Odette: "right" (Swan Lake 05.06-15).

This refusal has been shifted to Forest also. At first, she refused to break the spell because of her fear, she refused to accept her bravery and Wisdom to Lila, the Unicorn. But her single transformation shows her Innate identity to the whole world.

Odette: "wait please, you have the wrong girl I can't be the one. I haven't overcome anybody in my life I wish." (Swan Lake 16.56-17.04)

Lila, the Unicorn as the forest creature boosts her up, as a rationalist representative, Odette underestimates her and does not want to think about her.

Lila: "...hey you're braver than you think"

Odette: "at least one of us thinks so" (Swan Lake 28.10-15).

She revolves as a Bright Protagonist by showing her courage and wisdom throughout the process of breaking the spell and this bright diminished the so-called powerful authorities like the Queen, Prince, enchanter and Magical Supremacy.

So, the transformation is not a simple magical process. It teaches her life lesson to be herself despite her Fear, Innocence, Shy and Chaste which would be called the four basic



values of Women in Tamil-Atcham, Madam, Naanam, and Payirppu. Women are not an individual identity to hold all the qualities. Everyone knows it but does not understand it. Some built their wall for their success; some deviate from their role and go out of the level and some do it perfectly. This is the impact of modernism and the uncontrolled pace of freedom resulting from the lack of basic Rationalism.

For instance, If Odette knows she is making cookies for satisfying the needs of the common stomach, she would never stop the children to have them.

If she knows she is dancing for herself, not for others' eye candy, she would never hesitate to dance at a ball. If she knows her big responsibility to save the entire enchanted forest, she would never say **"I can't."** (*Swan Lake 16.59*).

Thus, everything happens after she transforms Swan (transformation of herself also). Owen Hurley may use any other form of Nature, but why Swan? Is there any reason for it? Yes, it is. White Swan has symbolic characteristics, According to Worldbirdscom LLC, Tchaikovsky depicted Feminine softness, beauty and Grace but the swan also symbolizes love, trust, loyalty, inner beauty, self-love and

TRANSFORMATION. Once Odette is transferred into Swan, she possesses all the mentioned characters or qualities.

LOVE: She knows the problem of the entire forest, as well as its being and she, understands their suffering too. Odette's mind cannot let her go by leaving them alone. Though she loves Prince Daniel more, she shows her passionate love and cares towards them which would be the ultimate success for our teacher. She does what has to be done, there is no room for dilemma and hesitation in her words. and for that, she says No to Daniel.

Odette: "Daniel, I...I can't..... I need to stay here to help them."

Daniel: "I'll Come back with an army."

Odette: "You can't. He is too powerful. He'll do to you what he's done to us."

Daniel: "I'll take that risk."

Odette: "and your men?!" (*Swan Lake 43.43-44.05*).

TRUST: As a character, Odette is not trusting herself to do things that she wishes. This would be the case at the beginning of the movie, she was introduced as a flat character. She looks like a motif of Refusal, due to the lack of trust in her. Her refusals are a rejection of Dance at the ball; rejection for Riding the Horse; rejection for accepting her foretold. She could not but her transformation transfers her from the outlook of the motif and gives her courage to defeat Rothbart. She completely trusts Fairy Queen and also her ability to break the spell. She follows the words of the Fairy Queen. She is ready to take the risk of going to the library the place which other fairy creatures are afraid to go.

Odette: "which self next Erasmus? we are going to find the book if it takes all day" (*Swan Lake 33.14-18*).

LOYALTY: She is a Loyal person, her loyalty doesn't change because of her transformation but gets a new form, she projected the true form of Loyalty by accepting his invitation to the ball and by succeeding in her challenge to safeguard the Forest. She lacks



confidence in her inner beauty and self-love in the first part of the movie. But in the second half she becomes an active protagonist, she finds out her ability, believes it and explores it through her wit and bravery.

TRANSFORMATION: Through the term, ‘bio religionism’ Berg and Dasmann explain, “a distant resonance among living things and factors which influence them that occurs specifically within each separate place on the planet” (65). This reflects on the location of the Forest too. When she was in town, she hesitates to mingle with outside people and they too didn’t care about her much. She is a helper to her father and a cook to her sister. Everything seems to be demand-based. And that is the ultimate set-up of the city Landscape. **“We were humans. We chose to be ants in the anthill, bees in the beehive- settlements for those who obeyed without question” (Aranyaka,012).** but the place forest contrasts it. As mentioned in the book of the forest *Aranyaka*, Amrita Patal pointed out that we are human and we are equal. **“I thought we were equals, bilateral symmetry of leaves. He, fire of enlightenment and me, fire of the microcosm” (093).** This is the exact situation in the forest. **“Human laws are meaningless” (022).** She transformed herself from a sensitive village girl to an intellectual girl in common. She understood her inner image from her friend Lila, the Unicorn.

Lila: “...hey you’re braver than you think”

Odette: “at least one of us thinks so” (Swan Lake 28.10-15).

As Saviour

Odette's Father: “I still can’t believe we’re here or that you saved this enchanted forest” (Swan Lake 1.14.44-50).

Odette: “a friend once told me you’re braver than you think turns out she was right” (Swan Lake 1.14.50-56).

Nature as a Teacher to the Kingdom as a Whole

Prince Daniel has appeared to be a very active young man. Adventuring and exploring are his main domain of wish along with this he loves hunting and is good at archery. His role in the movie, *Swan of Lake* is not merely a hero entry as Prince Daniel but a depiction of the entire ruling system. The opening scene shows the practice of targeting. Thus, the flashlight focuses on his hobby. The bond between the archery and Daniel is more powerful than the bond with his mother. The very first meeting them depicts the stereotypical practice of the Wedding plan. But our hero, Daniel refuses it because of his interest in exploring. So, this character introduction is just a normal action scene between Prince and Queen not a soulful talk between Son and Mother. She holds the power in her **eyes** not **love**. The same in the case of Daniel, he feels for what had bothered her mother but not cared for her.

As this paper previously illustrates the deviation of Odette’s attitude by comparing fairy creatures in the Forest, there is a deviation in the character of Prince Daniel also. More than Daniel, the word ‘Prince’ has its way of portraying the character. Owen Hurley has not taken Daniel as a single entity. He represents a Monarch through the character Daniel. Owen made Rothbart describe Daniel in one scene as perfect as could be.



Prince Daniel: “You wanted me to kill her.”

Rothbart: “Yeah a Hunter, aren’t you?” (*Barbie of the Swan Lake* 38.25-29).

He also screened how can a cultured society be ruled as well as how culture failed to learn from nature. “In the early 17th century, French father of modern philosophy René Descartes framed the world as essentially split between the realm of mind and that of inert matter”(Alberro,2019). This film has two types of the ruling party. One looks as cherished as the flowers as Kathyayini says, **“Life is a cherry tree in a good year-bent with fruit succulent to bursting point”** (Aranyaka, 013). Fairy Queen is the ruler of the cherished enchanted forest. Lila (unicorn), Carlita (Elf comes Shank), Ivan (Elf comes to Porcupine), and Erasmus (a troll) are some of the children of Forest. This forest has been enchanted not their minds of them. So, it flourishes even in an Enchanted situation. This enchanted forest resembles a home for all. It invites Odette, Daniel and all to the climax. On the contrary, the house of humans depicts the divisions of modernity. The townhouse is beautiful for those who had power or money. So even for a human, it would not be a happy place or home, obviously not for others. Owen Harley pictured the unlike situation of a bird and Lila, the unicorn. The symbolic representation of these creatures' intro scenes aims to project the attitude of humans towards non-humans. The bird flies over the palace as it needs a place to dwell. When she wets in the fountain, she feels good and relaxes on the pillar. But the shot of Daniel does not allow her to so, she flies again. This symbolic shot represents the disconnection between humans and the world of birds, their loving harmony has been affected by humans and also the humans missed its affectionate relationship. It's the same for Lila too. The crowd happens to attack her either to entertain themselves or for getting beneficial things from their King. These instances visualized clearly that the place of humans has been enchanted and is a place for anguish.

These changes had been done by humans, not by any other intervention. In the name of culture and civilization, people segregate themselves based on power, money, range of work and even through their actions. They cannot mingle within themselves. They are not merely showing respect towards the upper class or the ruling class. **“In human settlements, the best way to be safe is to threaten no one”** (Aranyaka027). Their action becomes systematized as they are doing their routine, they conditioned themselves to **do** respect instead of **showing** respect. But in the case of the forest, Fairy Queen became the ruler of the Forest by her uncle. Her uncle has chosen her for her wise and kind heart. She **cares** for the people and the forest instead of **ruling** it. This can be seen by some inferences through the known characters such as Lila and Odette. Odette maintains some systematic and accustomed signs of showing respect for Prince Daniel. She has to bow in front of prince Daniel despite the situation. They are not in town, now they are in danger in the enchanted forest. Even this situation stimulates her to do so. Prince Daniel also shows his attitude through gestures and questions to Odette. He does not care much about the pupil from his place. Instead, he asks about the place, Forest. They do not care or think about how to safeguard the people of Forest instead they roam around to ease themselves.



On the contrary, Lila the classy Unicorn of the Fairy Creatures of the forest can talk what she has in her mind directly to the Queen. Not only Lila, other characters in the film (Elves, Erasmus..) behave the way they are. They are not changing their own identity for the sake of power. They stand for their own identity especially Originality. They won't change under any circumstances and vice versa. But they show their respect and care in a kind way when it is needed not by any external force. Thus, **“Nature is so simple! It is so calm, so cool, so beautiful!”** (*Nature is My Teacher*). The Fairy Queen is projected as a model for the leader. Her focus line on the movie is very less compared to Odette and Rothbart for the matter. She appears only for a few scenes but in a powerful way. The main focus of the story is Odette and her way of breaking the spell. This movie also projects some important areas like class Division, Self-realism, and Authority. These things seem to be lacking properties of vivisected culture. As William says, **“...relationships are not only of ideas and experiences but of rent and interest, of situation and power; a wider system”** (*The Country and the City*,7). But later, they learn everything from nature and its creatures. As Amrita Patal mentioned, **“O Sun, be my teacher. No one else can satisfy me”** (*Aranyaka*,073). Nature is pictured as a great teacher to whom it has been needed. One of the Instances is Fairy Queen. In a contrast to the character Queen of the town, Fairy Queen **cares** for the people rather than **rules**. At the very first meeting, she was not utter any exaggerated words and not yelled out her storyline of the forest. Instead, she thanked Odette for saving Lila.

Fairy Queen: “First, let me thank you for helping Lila” (14.35-37).

This shows she cares more than anything. She is a pure heart and she never forces Odette to save the forest, she knows the risk so she left it to her choice. But when Daniel is in dire need of Odette, he is ready to take the risk not alone but with an army. For his selfish need, he is ready to sacrifice the lives of people. But even for saving the entire forest none is willing to allow Odette to take the risk, especially the fairy queen. **“Aranya doesn't mind you alive, it doesn't mind you dead. In fact, it doesn't care one way or the other”** (*Aranyaka*,022). But ironically Forest serves as the place for safeguard and rationale and the place of humans is a place of irrationality.

In the storyline, Saviour (Odette) saves the forest. But it connotes that the Forest (teacher) saves the Human. As Prabhaskar Karan says, **“Through nature, our logic develops into psychology, our sense moves to sensation, and our moral matures to principles”** (*Nature is My Teacher*). In the climax, the entire human community that they focused, on happened to be in the forest as a creature of Nature not the product of culture. They seem to be happy and logical in their way. The transformation affects the whole and creates a change in their mind.

Odette's Father to Prince Daniel: “First I have one very important question young man. How many layers for the wedding cake?”

Odette: “as many, as you'd like papa”

Lila, the Unicorn: “and can it have a lot of those frosting flowers! I love those flowers. (1.15.01-15).



Lila is not hurt by any human and the baker family doesn't have to customise their respect for their Prince. All becomes one and fine.

Conclusion

There will always be a teacher for everyone to give tremendous things which never known by anyone that they need it. That is nature. As Karan says, “**As we attach ourselves with nature, it makes us delight every moment (*Nature is My Teacher*)**”. The ultimate aim of our life is to *Live and let Live* as humans failed to do in a civilised society. At times nature tries to teach us but literacy scholarship dominates and blocks the mind to think wisely. This paper elaborated on this idea from an ecological perspective. Thus, *Barbie of Swan Lake* is not just a movie of Fantasy but a book of Ingenuity.

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