

## UNRAVELLING THE NOTIONS OF ECOLOGICAL PHILOSOPHY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF LANGUAGE ECOLOGY IN LITERARY TEXT

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### **Abstract**

*This study presents an Eco-philosophical analysis of *The Shadow Line* by Joseph Conrad by taking into consideration Arne Naess's Deep Ecology framework. Naess's eco-philosophical model comprises of seven components; however, this research focuses on its four key principles, viz. the rejection of the man-in-environment image, biospherical egalitarianism, the principles of biodiversity and symbiosis, and the fight against pollution and resource depletion. Correspondingly, findings of the study demonstrate how Conrad depicts the intrinsic interconnectedness between humans and the natural environment, particularly through representations of the sea, the ship, and maritime life. Furthermore, the study highlights the psychological development of the protagonist, illustrating how interaction with nature contributes to personal-psychological growth, maturity and self-realization. Likewise, based on these findings, future research may explore *The Shadow Line* through an interdisciplinary approach that integrates Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) with Ecocriticism or philosophy to further examine the ethical and moral interconnectedness between humans in order to probe their bidirectional causal relationships.*

**Keywords/Phrases:** *Eco-philosophical analysis; Deep Ecology; Ecocriticism; Resource Depletion; Man-in-environment; Arne Naess*

### **Introduction**

The word “eco-sophy” or “eco-philosophy/ecological philosophy” is the combination of two Greek words, eco from oikos which means “house,” “household” or “habitat” and “sophy” is from Sophia which means wisdom. In the same line, the word “eco-sophy” collectively means the wisdom of household or the wisdom of the Earth (Mishra, 2017). Generally, the Norwegian Philosopher, Arne Naess is considered the founding father of Eco-philosophy. As he defined, Eco-philosophy in his seminal article on “Deep Ecology” in 1973 as all the living beings have inherent or intrinsic value without being useful only to human beings (Naess, 1994; Gul et al., 2023). Furthermore, he made a distinction between shallow and deep ecology in the same article. He opined that Shallow Ecology as to fight against pollution and resource depletion. In the same line, deep ecology is divided into further components including, intrinsic value, Bio-spherical

egalitarianism, Principles of Biodiversity and symbiosis, and Fight against pollution and resource depletion (Akhter et al., 2025). It suggests that Arne Naess is of the opinion that all living things have their own intrinsic or inherent values rather to be worthy of something for human beings.

Moreover, a Norwegian linguist one of the key figures in the domain of Ecolinguistics, Arran Stubbe (2015) defines Deep Ecology as the intrinsic worth of humans, plants, animals, forests, and rivers, these are of great value and use for humans. Deep Ecology is to understand the worth of each thing in the universe that support life and human beings to protect and respect them including human life. Similarly, if the worth of everything in the universe is understood, all the social issues and injustices will be resolved to nothing (Reisch, 2002; Gill et al., 2025).

Apart from these definitions of Deep Ecology, according to the French psychoanalyst Félix Guattari (1989), there are three ecologies: the environment, social relations, and human subjectivity. Moreover, Guattari combines these three ecologies into a single entity, which we call Eco-sophy. He says, "We must theorize the ecology as a domain that covers the environmental, the social, and the mental (the complex, environmental-social-mental." Furthermore, The Three Ecologies emphasizes the notion that these Ecologies must be conceptualized to understand the differences between all the living systems.

In the same vein, an American writer and philosopher, Aldo Leopold, coined the new concept of the "Land Ethic. He is of the opinion that the evolution of ethics depends upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community that depends on each other. Moreover, the land ethic expands the boundary of that community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or, collectively, the land Leopold 1970. It implies that for Leopold, the land is the place where everyone and everything should be respected by both sides to live and act in the premises of ethics, as ethics shapes society and makes it grow higher (Callicott, 2013).

This study adopts the Eco-Philosophical framework of Arne Naess, which consists of four components: Rejection of the Man-in-Environment Image, Biodiversity and Symbiosis Principles, and the Fight Against Pollution and Resource Depletion. This comprehensive Deep Ecology framework, often referred to as the Eco-Philosophical framework, studies the relationship between humans and the environment, the ways they affect and prioritise each other, through literary and Eco-Philosophical lenses. The researcher chose the novella *The Shadow Line* by Polish-British novelist Joseph Conrad, published in 1976. Additionally, this novella is studied from an Eco-Philosophical perspective by applying Arne Naess's framework.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Eco-Philosophy is a rapidly growing field, as many disciplines are interested in studying the relationship between humans, language, and the natural environment. Many research studies have been conducted on the ecological themes, but limited attention has been paid to how language itself works in a literary text. Along the same lines, the current study focuses on the effects of humans and the environment on one another, as represented in this literary text. Furthermore, this study reveals the Eco-Philosophical literature through the lens of Arne Naess's theory of Deep Ecology. The current study reveals how Joseph Conrad speculates on the ways in which man-in-environment is rejected, and the total-field image is accepted. Most importantly, this research focuses on the eco-philosophical themes and message, transformed through literary techniques, in a literary text by Joseph Conrad. Through this Deep Ecological analysis, readers can understand how Eco-philosophical themes and Deep Ecological components are used to highlight the essential roles of intrinsic value and biospherical egalitarianism in the survival of human beings on the earth. Furthermore, the study unravels the role of literature in promoting

principles of diversity, symbiosis, and ethical contemplation, urging readers to scrutinize institutions that favour comfort and advancement over ecological and moral sustainability.

### **Research Questions**

- i. What eco-philosophical themes are represented in Joseph Conrad's novella *The Shadow Line*?
- ii. How does the Eco-philosophy is portrayed in Joseph Conrad's novella *The Shadow Line*?

### **Research Objectives**

- i. To interpret the eco-philosophical themes in Joseph Conrad's novella *The Shadow Line*.
- ii. To reveal the portrayal of Eco-philosophy in Joseph Conrad's novella *The Shadow Line*.

### **Significance of the Study**

This research study focuses on the emerging interdisciplinary discussion between linguistics, literature, and environmental humanities by emphasizing on Language Ecology as a framework. Apart from that, the study goes against the traditional approaches of ecocritical studies which focuses only on the ecocritical themes. This study tries to reveal the hidden ecological philosophy in linguistics structures and symbolic patterns of literary texts. The study in hand, deepens our understanding of how literary text marks relationship between human and nature and ecological consciousness. Additionally, the study encourages environmental awareness and ethical responsibility by revealing the intrinsic value and the importance of living things and their environment. In this way, the research not only advances academic inquiry but also underscores the role of literature and language in fostering sustainable ecological thinking in contemporary society.

### **Literature Review**

Literature review are the available resources about specific field to enhance basic knowledge of the research that has previously been conducted in this field (Rowley & Slack, 2004). This study examines the research investigating the notion of deep ecology and the themes relevant to the environment. Similarly, this literature review explains the specific studies conducted on the literary texts, which underscores the problems of the societies. Furthermore, this section analyses the research studies chosen for the literature review because of their relevance to this research. Moreover, Koprina et al. (2018) examines the concept of anthropocentrism and the ethical consequences on moral and ecological concerns. In the same vein, they discover various points because it prioritizes values over other things; researchers criticize anthropocentrism because it can potentially take to damaging the environment for human benefits. Furthermore, they suggest focusing on the inequalities before highlighting environmental protection because these inequalities put impact on environmental issues. It is because disparities impact ecological problems. According to findings of their study, prioritising the interests can drive the actions intended to safeguard the environment. Consequently, recognizing the function of ecosystems as support systems for humans might result in a sense of responsibility and caring for creatures that are not human.

Moreover, another study is conducting Arne Naess's eco-philosophical framework on William Wordsworth's *The Prelude*. In this study, William Wordsworth represents child's journey who gains poetic consciousness through interaction with nature. Nature is personified as a mother, a friend and a teacher which helping his maturity. As the eco-philosophical and phenomenological

thoughts is concerned, Wordsworth emphasizes the truth, pureness, peace, and pleasure accompanied by the solitude in Nature (Özsert, 2023).

Furthermore, a study is conducted on the novel *The Overstory* where the researchers (Ghafoor et al., 2024) focus on the connection between people and the natural world. In the same vein, every character in the *Overstory* goes through a transformational journey that serves as a reminder of the connection between humanity and nature. The novel gives the impression that trees bear sentiments that communicate with one another, help each other, and care for their environment through descriptions. Moreover, this analysis effectively demolishes human-oriented ideas by demonstrating resilient and enduring significance of the nature that outspread beyond its utility to humanity. The researcher adopts Naess's (1989) theoretical framework. In addition, the novel inspires us to rethink the sense of superiority and urgency imposed on ourselves by drawing attention to the ongoing processes taking place in nature. Consequently, the novel emphasizes the necessity of taking action to cultivate a mutually beneficial relationship between humans and the natural environment.

Additionally, several scholars have explored deep ecology in relation to environmental ethics and literary representation, further highlighting the tension between anthropocentric and ecocentric worldviews. Naess's (1973, 1989) original formulation of deep ecology emphasizes the intrinsic value of all living beings and calls for a fundamental reorientation of human attitudes toward nature, a principle that has been fruitfully applied to literary texts that decentre the human subject. Garrard (2012) argues that ecocritical readings informed by deep ecology expose how narratives can either reinforce or resist dominant anthropocentric ideologies, especially in Romantic and contemporary nature writing. Similarly, Buell (2005) contends that environmental literature not only mirrors ecological crises but also shapes ethical responses by inviting readers to imagine nonhuman agency and multispecies communities. More recent studies demonstrate how deep ecological perspectives intersect with postcolonial and ecofeminist concerns, revealing how environmental degradation is entangled with power, inequality, and marginalization (Plumwood, 2002; Shiva, 2016). Despite these important contributions, there remains a lack of sustained, text-specific analysis of how deep ecology is aesthetically encoded through narrative voice, imagery, and characterization in individual works, especially within South Asian Anglophone fiction. This gap justifies a closer examination of selected literary texts to uncover how they articulate an ecocentric ethic that challenges human exceptionalism and proposes alternative, more reciprocal models of human nature relations.

However, these works offer numerous perspectives, there is an apparent gap in the investigation of how deep ecology is portrayed in literary texts. Although these analyses provide several perspectives on the relationship between humans and nature, they challenge anthropocentrism in an oblique way through narratives.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This research adopts a qualitative research approach for the interpretation of the Novella *The Shadow Line* (1976) by Polish British Novelist Joseph Conrad through the lens of the Deep Ecology. Furthermore, qualitative research is a prominent approach for the analysis of a novella while applying various techniques, including, close reading, critical reading, reading in chunks among others (Ohrvik, 2024). However, this research follows close reading technique owing to its productive attentiveness and its close connection with the development of hermeneutics. It implies that close reading technique enables researchers to understand how a text works and

accordingly it creates its effects on the most minute level. In the same line, the deep ecology seeks how connection of humans and their nature is represented through the usage of deep ecology in the text of the novella.

### **Sample**

The sample selected for the study is novella *The Shadow Line* (1976) by Joseph Conrad which helps as the primary text for the analysis of deep ecology.

### **Data Collection**

In this study, *The Shadow Line* (1976) by Joseph Conrad analysed through the theory of Deep Ecology by Arne Naess. Arne Naess's theory of deep ecology mainly consists of Man-in-Environment Image, Bio-spherical Egalitarianism, Principles of Diversity and Symbiosis and Fight Against Pollution and Resource Depletion. In the same vein, this analysis helps identify how these elements contribute to the text's eco-philosophical thinking and the connection of humans and their environment.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

The data analysis procedure utilizes deep ecology of Arne Naess to examine the four components in *The Shadow Line*. The analysis of the study is conducted through close reading which focuses on the deep ecology in the novella. Furthermore, the analysis aims to unravel the underlying ecological philosophy. The results of the study are presented through the qualitative research approach.

### **Analysis and Discussion**

#### **Rejection of the Man-in-Environment Image**

It is one of four components of ecological philosophy which is often referred to as deep ecology. According to Arne Naess (1994) there is man-in-environment and total-field image. Arne Naess refuses the dominant image of humans and gives importance to all other creatures. (Man-in-environment) All the organisms live in a bio-spherical not where they share their intrinsic values, without sharing their intrinsic values no relation is possible among them. Moreover, the man-in-environment is often rejected by the total field image every time except in the superficial or preliminary level of communication.

In the novella *The Shadow Line*, Conrad undermines hierarchical representation by depicting the sea not as a submissive object but as an active force which determines the force shaping human destiny. The character's, young captain, psychological transformation does not occur in isolation but through confrontation with natural forces.

For instance, Conrad describes the ship which enters in the harbour:

*“There is something touching about a ship coming in from sea and folding her white wings for a rest.” (Chapter 1)*

The ship is represented as a living being which dissolves the stern boundaries between human technology and organic life. Furthermore, the sea is not represented as a conquered space but an environment that mandates respect.

*It was impossible to distinguish land from water in the enigmatical tranquillity of the immense forces of the world. A sudden impatience possessed me. (Chapter 4)*

The chapter 4 of the novella starts by stretching distinction between the nature and the humans. These lines clarify the helplessness of the humans against nature. Humans Surrenders when nature shows its nature to them while they are busy in destroying her.

Above all, the character of Captain Ellis is portrayed as *“a sort of divine (pagan) emanation, the deputy-Neptune for the circumambient seas” (Chapter 1)*. Similarly, the comparison to Neptune

implies that human authority is merely submissive and the ultimate power bears by sea itself. Consequently, even an administrative authority is symbolically accountable to natural forces. Furthermore, the author Conrad consistently focuses on unpredictability of the sea. The command offered to the narrator is a trial embedded in environmental conditions not simply a career opportunity for him. The sea becomes a violent force which dissolves the illusion of human supremacy to the other entities. Moreover, the Captain himself admits that he was “*But it was not hesitation on my part. I had been, if I may express myself so, put out of gear mentally*” (Chapter 1). This whole conversation suggests that natural and existential pressures exceed rational control.

Consequently, Conrad utterly refuses the anthropocentric model. Humans are not superior or managers of environment but are shaped, tested, and mould by it. The sea is portrayed ontological equal, if not superior which destabilizes the “Man-in-Environment” image and affirming ecological embeddedness.

### **Bio-spherical Egalitarianism**

The main idea discussed in the component of Arne Naess’s deep ecology is the equal right to live and blossom should not be limited only to humans but every single entity living in that environment. Furthermore, Naess stated that the loss of life-quality should not be taken serious of only humans but animals and other related creatures which have been utilizing for the well-being of human beings (Naess, 1994).

Naess’s principle of bio-spherical egalitarianism asserts the equal rights to all the lives or living organisms. Similarly, the author of *The Shadow Line* affirms this equality by portraying humans, ships, climate, and sea as interconnected participants in a shared setting. The stifling or hot environment is not merely attractive, but it employs physical impact:

“*The heat of the tropical East descended through the leafy boughs, enveloping my thinly clad body, clinging to my rebellious discontent, as if to rob it of its freedom.*” (Chapter 1)

In this line, the author represents the environment as an active agent which affects human psychology. The heat “clings,” shapes emotional and physical states which implies that the nature possesses agency comparable to human will.

Similarly, the Malay crew and workers at harbour are represented not as background characters but as essential figures to nautical life. Conrad portrays “*the Malay crew of the steam-launch standing by looked stonily at the man for whom they were going to be kept on duty so late*” (Chapter 2) which put emphasis on the shared network sustaining seafaring existence. Human hierarchies eliminate under environmental catastrophe, and all the involved entities are equally vulnerable to the sea’s conditions.

Furthermore, Conrad describes the sea in dynamic terms: “*the dark-blue sparkling sea and the paler luminous blue of the sky*” (Chapter 1). This description of the sea elevates non-human elements to aesthetic and narrative prominence which possess nature is not only influential but meaningful.

Moreover, Conrad describes the ship in these words:

“*There is something touching about A ship coming in from sea and folding her white wings for a rest.*” (chapter 1)

This description of the ship shows the importance of her and implies she bears the same prestige as humans, and she should be given same respect and reverence as humans.

Consequently, such descriptions of the ship and sea foresee Naess’s egalitarian ethos. Humans do not dominate the maritime world rather; they coexist with forces and entities that holds intrinsic

presence and value. Thus, the novella affirms a social ecology shapes human and non-human shared existential dignity.

### **Principles of Diversity and Symbiosis**

The third component of the Naess's Deep ecology focuses on the diversity of life in a society. He glorifies the diversity of life as it enhances the chances of new modes of life, increases the potentialities of survival, and the richness of forms. Furthermore, he says that the struggle of life should be interpreted as the ability to exist mutually rather than exploiting or suppressing other entities. Similarly, Naess emphasizes; "Live or let live, is a more powerful ecological principle than Either you or me" (Naess, 1994).

Naess emphasizes biodiversity and symbiosis as essential element for ecological balance. In *The Shadow Line*, the role of sea life portrays as a complex network of connection among diverse human cultures and natural forces.

Conrad describes the possession of ship as:

*For an Arab owned her, and a Syed at that. Hence the green border on the flag. He was the head of a great House of Straits Arabs, but as loyal a subject of the complex British Empire as you could find east of the Suez Canal. (Chapter 1)*

Through these lines, the author of the novella implies that the multicultural maritime economy reflects ecological symbiosis. Arab ownership, British command, Malay crew, and tropical geography form an interconnected social system. Similarly, amidst the sea no single identity dominates anyone and survival depends on cooperation.

Additionally, Conrad writes:

*She traded among dark islands on a blue reef-scarred sea, with the Red Ensign over the taffrail and at her masthead a house-flag, also red, but with a green border and with a white crescent in it. (Chapter 1)*

The disfigured sea induces ecological complexity. As in the novella, the reefs represent biodiversity and vulnerability which requires respect for this intricate environment for the navigation of the ship in the sea. Similarly, the role of the captain depends upon knowledge of natural diversity including reefs, currents, climate patterns.

*"A puff, then a calm, and in a moment, you'll see, she'll be swinging on her heel with her head away from her course to the devil somewhere." Chapter 6*

This line represents the instability and unpredictability of natural forces at sea. The brief "puff" followed by "a calm" reflect the necessity of wind for the movement and survival of the crew. It shows ecological fragility which demonstrates that human development and progress is dependent upon unstable environmental conditions beyond human control or authority.

The sea voyage thus becomes a metaphor for ecological interdependence. Cultural diversity (Arab, British, Malay) parallels biological diversity (reefs, islands, seas). Conrad portrays maritime existence as a web of relations where disruption including the death of a captain that threatens the whole system.

Consequently, the novella reverberates with Naess's emphasis on biodiversity and symbiosis as essential to stability and growth.

### **Fight Against Pollution and Resource Depletion**

The last component of the Naess's Deep Ecology or Ecological Philosophy focuses on the fight against pollution and depletion of resources from the environment. Similarly, this happens when the focus is given to only the resource depletion and reduction of pollution while avoiding evils of other kinds. Furthermore, Naess gives example to elaborate this component by saying that if

the prices of life necessities increase because of the installation of anti-pollution devices, class differences increase too (Naess, 1994).

In the novella *The shadow Line* Conrad does not explicitly highlight industrial pollution, but he criticizes moral and spiritual degradation which the important points of Naess's philosophy.

The narrator experiences a deep sense of emptiness:

*The past eighteen months, so full of new and varied experience, appeared a dreary, prosaic waste of days. I felt — how shall I express it? — that there was no truth to be got out of them. (Chapter 1)*

In this line, Conrad use metaphor by comparing the “waste” with the days of life which has been wasted amidst the sea and suffered. Furthermore, maritime life, mainly steam-driven commerce, endangers the reduction of existence to mechanical routine. Earlier, he noted the ship was a steamship and therefore “*not entitled to that blind loyalty*” (Chapter 1) which implies that the technological modernity weakens organic bonds.

The bureaucratic world of the Harbour Office further reflects non-natural control structures. The narrator describes:

*The atmosphere of officialdom would kill anything that breathes the air of human endeavour, would extinguish hope and fear alike in the supremacy of paper and ink. (Chapter 1)*

This is a metaphor of suffocation resembles with environmental degradation which implies that institutional organisations “kill” strength, just as pollution destroys ecosystems.

Furthermore, the fight against depletion, in ecological terms, demonstrates the acceptance of command of the narrator. He chooses risk, responsibility, and engagement with natural forces rather than retreat into sterile bureaucracy. The sea voyage becomes restorative, re-establishing authentic connection between human agency and natural challenge.

*It was impossible to tell whence the blow would come. To look round the ship was to look into a bottomless, black pit. The eye lost itself in inconceivable depths. (Chapter 6)*

These lines from the novella *The Shadow Line* show how huge and unpredictable the natural world is. The “bottomless, black pit” represents the sea's infinite depth and unpredictability, which makes it harder for people to see and control things. In the same way, these lines show how fragile life is, which makes people seem insignificant in the face of huge ecological forces.

As a result, Conrad stresses the need to fight against spiritual and existential defilement. The main character fights against mechanistic modernity by facing the challenges of the water. This brings them back into a more connected ecological relationship. In Naessian terms, the novella calls for regeneration via reconnecting with natural processes. It also criticizes modern ways of existence that cut people off from the profundity of the environment.

### Conclusion

This study utilized Eco-Philosophical framework of Deep Ecology proposed by Arne Naess to *The Shadow Line* by Joseph Conrad to examine the ecological consciousness embedded within the literary text. Furthermore, through the four central components including Rejection of the Man-in-Environment image, Bio-spherical Egalitarianism, Principles of Biodiversity and Symbiosis, and the Fight Against Pollution and Resource Depletion, the novella reveals a profound critique of anthropocentrism and modern impartiality from nature. The representation of the sea by Conrad as an active, determining force destabilizes human supremacy and situates the protagonist within a larger ecological order. The ship, the sea, climate, and multicultural maritime community function as interdependent entities which reflect Naess's principle of ecological interdependence. Furthermore, the psychological transformation of protagonists

symbolizes a movement from ego-centered aim towards ecological responsibility. Although the novella *The Shadow Line* is written in the early twentieth century, anticipates fundamental principles of Deep Ecology protagonist's humility, balance, and ethical engagement with the natural world. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that *The Shadow Line* is not merely a maritime initiation narrative but an eco-philosophical text that foregrounds humanity, rather than dominate over the biosphere.

### Recommendations

The future recommendations for further research are to investigate *The Shadow Line* through linguistics framework including Systemic Functional Linguistics or interdisciplinary approaches. Furthermore, future research can further explore maritime fiction through the lens of Deep Ecology in other literary texts. Comparative eco-philosophical analyses between *The Shadow Line* and other texts may reveal broader ecological patterns within early modern literature. Apart from these approaches, interdisciplinary approaches combining philosophy, literary studies, and environmental humanities be adopted to deepen the theoretical scope of eco-criticism. Finally, further studies can explore the ways in which Conrad portrayed maritime authority which challenges colonial and anthropocentric ideologies.

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