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**Title: Human and Nonhuman Existence: Exploring Literary Ecology in Select Works of Victorian Fiction**

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### **Synopsis**

Victorian fiction has been critically analysed in various ways. However, there are works of fiction which are yet to be explored in terms of their ecological content. Margaret Gatty's *Parables from Nature* (1855), Charles Kingsley's *The Water Babies* (1862-63), Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty: The Autobiography of a Horse* (1877) and Kipling's *The Jungle Books* (1894 and 1895) and *Just So Stories* (1902) appear to have the potential to undergo an ecocritical analysis. In the proposed research work an attempt will be made to probe into the texts from an ecological approach, with special reference to Joseph Meeker's theory of literary ecology.

*The Water Babies: A Fairy Tale for a Land- Baby* (1862-63), is considered to be a popular Victorian text which has been examined from various critical angles. For instance Jessica Straley in her essay "Of Beasts and Boys: Kingsley, Spencer and the Theory of Recapitulation" marks the text as a satire on morphology and its practitioners. She also states that Kingsley was a supporter of the theory of evolution and he wanted to reconcile it with natural theology that interpreted the beauty and order of the physical world as a demonstration of divine design. Brendan Rapple in his essay "Charles Kingsley's *The Water-Babies*: The Spiritual and Physical Cleansing Properties of Water" interlinks various motifs which are associated with water such as social class, virtue, physical as well as psychological cleanliness and of course moral purification. In the essay "Marvelous Plasticity and the Fortunes of Species in the *Water Babies*", Anna Neill examines Kingsley's critique of evolution in the context of social and biological development. Ravenna Helson wrote on "The Psychological Origins of Fantasy for Children in Mid-Victorian England" to discuss contemporary conflicts that left their imprint even on fairy tales. Though the *Water Babies* has a story line involving human and nonhuman entities it has not been explored ecocritically.

*Black Beauty* has been subjected to critical studies of animal oppression. Harriet Ritvo in her book *Animal Estate* has noted the frequent interchanges of the terms used for domestic servants and domestic animals in the nineteenth century. Robert Dingley in "A Horse of a Different Color: Black Beauty and the Pressure of Indebtedness" observes Sewell's *Black Beauty* as a text which emphasizes the portrayal of Victorian perception of the indebtedness involved in the master-servant relation. *Black Beauty* has also been categorized under the umbrella term of 'pony-stories' which is a part of literature about animals. In "Riders, Readers, Romance: A Short History of the Pony Story", Jenny Kendrick points out that *Black Beauty* is not just a crusade against maltreatment of animals but it also acknowledges the social forces that compel humans into such behaviour. However, the classic observation on the concept of talking animals in

respect of this text has been Tess Cosslett's *Talking Animals in British Children's Fiction, 1786-1914* where tracing the origins of animal stories, she investigates its distinct nineteenth century form. She had also considered Gatty's *Parables from Nature* from this perspective as Gatty's text involves not just talking domestic animals as we see in Sewell, but initiates the representation of communicating animals at large.

During the Victorian period, Margaret Gatty was known for her scientific pursuits and literary contributions. Alan Rauch in "Parables and Parodies: Margaret Gatty's Audiences in *Parables from Nature*" asserted that there has been a misreading of Gatty in terms of her perceived status merely as a quaint Victorian botanizer and the mother of the extremely popular children's fiction writer Juliana Horatia Ewing. Rauch also finds that *Parables from Nature* was meant for a broader audience which included not only the children but also the adults who would read out the stories to them. Stephen E. Hunt in "Free, Bold, Joyous": The Love of Sea-Weed in Margaret Gatty and other Mid-Victorian Writers" insists that Gatty reflects on the world of nature like other contemporary nature writers such as Elizabeth Anne Allom (*The Sea-weed Collector*, 1841), Isabella Gifford (*The Marine Botanist*, 1848) or Philip Henry Gosse. Gatty's *Parables* presented talking plants and animals but they have not been seen as fanciful, rather critics like Mary Ellen Bellanca in "'Recollecting Nature': George Eliot's 'Ilfacombe Journal' and Victorian Women's Natural History Writing" view her work as a strong example of Victorian nature writing. Despite the presence of strong ecological components, Gatty's *Parables* has not been approached ecocritically except by Tess Cosslett.

Considering the texts of Kipling, Noel Annan in "Kipling's Place in the History of Ideas", found Kipling symbolizing a part of British political and social history about which his countrymen have an uneasy conscience. Kipling is mostly viewed as an imperialist writer but there are critics who have tried to analyse a different side of him considering his writings for children. Dieter Petzold in "Fantasy out of Myth and Fable: Animal Stories in Rudyard Kipling and Richard Adams" argued that Kipling's *Just So Stories* and *Jungle Books* have deep roots in myths and folklore. Charles Allen's biographical study "Kipling Sahib – India and the making of Rudyard Kipling" articulates that Kipling's Bombay childhood left a deep imprint on his psyche because the servants who attended him used to cater to his fancy with Indian tales. Petzold also analysed the humanization and individualization of animals in Kipling's *Jungle Books* in terms of the desire for the reconciliation of the primitive natural laws and 'The Laws' (an elaborate code of civilized behaviour) of human world. Jane Hotchkiss in "The Jungle of Eden: Kipling, Wolf Boys, and the Colonial Imagination" interpreted the protagonist of *Jungle Books*, Mowgli as an ideal representation of the wild child capable of forming a bond between his human self and non-human environment. John McBratney in "Imperial Subjects, Imperial Space in Kipling's *Jungle Books*" dealt with Mowgli's dual identity and manifestations of colonial space and subject. Carole Scott in "Kipling's Combat Zones: Training Grounds in the Mowgli Stories, *Captains Courageous* and *Stalky & Co.*" found a reflection of Kipling's own obsession for law and order in *Jungle Books*. Again, it is observed that these are not always ecocritical studies of Kipling's works.

Despite dissimilarities in content and style, these texts appear to have the potential for ecocritical analysis. These texts have been explored from socio-cultural and imperial angles, but not ecological, therefore there is substantial scope for ecocritical research in the proposed thesis. Ecocriticism assesses how humans are related to and affect their ecology and environment as

represented in literature. Garrard in *Ecocriticism* described the different branches of ecocriticism such as environmentalism, deep ecology, ecofeminism and social ecology. In the proposed research ecocriticism is the overarching critical tool. In particular, however, Joseph Meeker's idea of literary ecology as discussed in *The Comedy of Survival* will be focused on. Meeker's idea of literary ecology suggests that creation of literature is a unique human function which assists in comprehending ecological relations and the effect that it has on the welfare and survival of humanity and ecology. According to Meeker certain human activities are favourable for survival while some of them are destructive at the individual as well as collective levels. To Meeker, acts of destruction are tragic and acts and instincts leading to survival are comic. He stated that animals prioritise survival while humans often prove destructive and analysed a number of literary texts from the perspective of literary ecology. In the light of Meeker's idea of literary ecology, in the proposed research work there will be an attempt to analyse selected Victorian works of fiction to explore their tragic or comic ecological potential.

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She [was](#) Victorian; and since I always saw her in the same static long shot, with her back turned, she represented a reproach on the Victorian Age. An outcast. I didn't know her crime, but I wished to protect her. The work was televised ten years later. The title story focuses on a confrontation between a pseudosophisticated man of the world with a reclusive shaman who shatters his poorly conceived notions of reality, a theme explored more broadly in *The Magus*. This volume contains a translation of a twelfth-century romance written by Marie de France. Fowles's original title for this collection was *Variations*. An existential detective novel for the postmodern culture. Works in Literary Context. Influences. Major Victorian Poets. Poets shifted from the extremely personal expression (or subjectivism) of the Romantic writers to an objective surveying of the problems of human life. The poems of Tennyson, Browning, and Arnold especially reflect this change. Much Victorian poetry was put to the service of society. Alfred Tennyson (1809-92) attempted to give direction to his readers. 'Idylls of the King' (1859) is a disguised study of current ethical and social conditions. 'Locksley Hall' (1842), 'In Memoriam' (1850), and 'Maud' (1855) deal with conflicting scientific and social ideas. Much of Tennyson's poetry, however, can be read without worrying about such problems. His narrative skill makes many of his poems interesting just as stories. The Victorian Period. Special thanks to Mary Bowden of Indiana University for writing this introduction! The Victorian period of literature roughly coincides with the years that Queen Victoria ruled Great Britain and its Empire (1837-1901). During this era, Britain was transformed from a predominantly rural, agricultural society into an urban, industrial one. New technologies like railroads and the steam printing press united Britons both physically and intellectually. The working class, women, and people of color were agitating for the right to vote and rule themselves. Reformers fought for safe workplaces, sanitary reforms, and universal education. Victorian literature reflects these values, debates, and cultural concerns. Scifeed alert for new publications. Never miss any articles matching your research from any publisher. Get alerts for new papers matching your research. Find out the new papers from selected authors. Updated daily for 49'000+ journals and 6000+ publishers. Define your Scifeed now. —. Create a SciFeed alert for new publications. —. Share this article. Click here to see the statistics on "Philosophy and Literature" . Influence of Victorian era literature and poetry. Famous novelists and their works. Victorian Poetry was also indifferent from the already stated style. Much of the work of the time is seen as a bridge between the romantic era and the modernist poetry of the next century. Alfred Lord Tennyson held the poet laureateship for over forty years. The husband and wife poetry team of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Browning conducted their love affair through verse and produced many tender and passionate poems. The reclaiming of the past was a major part of Victorian literature and was to be found in both classical literature and also the medieval literature of England.