

RELIGIOUS AND LITERARY TEXTS AS POWERFUL TOOLS FOR RESHAPING THE POWER DYNAMIC IN ENVIRONMENTAL DECISION-MAKING

Summary: *According to scholars advocating the 'deep ecology' standpoint, the root of the ecological crisis lies in monotheistic religions, particularly Western Christianity, which established a system of dualities based on dichotomies such as male/female, soul/body, culture/nature, heaven/earth, and man/nature. This paper seeks to illuminate the importance of revitalizing the ecological principles within the Christian tradition as a response to the urgent challenges presented by the increasing peril of environmental degradation in contemporary society. It seeks to demonstrate that religion and literature are powerful sources with great potential to contribute to environmental ethics and global sustainability. In other words, to effectively address global environmental concerns, we must tap into the ecological wisdom embedded in religious and literary (and religiously inspired literary) texts. This requires handling these texts with care, understanding them in their proper context, and reevaluating them thoughtfully. Instead of emphasizing dualisms that widen the gap between radical ecologists and radical anthropologists, the paper rejects binary oppositions. It draws upon ideas advocated by fourth-wave ecocritics, who introduce the notion of transcorporeality and recognize the interconnectedness between humans and the more-than-human world. Transcorporeality refers to the idea that the human body and the environment/nature (and similarly, the human mind/soul and environment) cannot be viewed as separate entities. This concept is essential to the paper's central idea: the hypothesis that literature, art, religion, and all other forms of creative expression should be regarded as renewable energy sources with significant applications in the physical world/nature. Embracing the concept of transcorporeality liberates human beings from the constraints of dualistic ideology, enabling a more genuine expression and development of spirituality and humanity while promoting the preservation of the planet's balance and sustainability.*

Keywords: *ecocriticism, transcorporeality, body/soul and nature/environment, literary and religious texts, environmental ethics*

¹ Faculty of Philology, Sinergija, Bijeljina, Bosnia and Herzegovina.
E-mail: mskobo@sinergija.edu.ba

RELIGIJSKI I KNJIŽEVNI TEKSTOVI KAO MOĆNI ALAT ZA PREOBLIKOVANJE DINAMIKE MOĆI U ODLUČIVANJU O ŽIVOTNOJ SREDINI

Rezime: *Prema naučnicima koji zastupaju stanovište 'duboke ekologije', koren ekološke krize leži u monoteističkim religijama, posebno u zapadnom hrišćanstvu, jer su one uspostavile sistem dualizama kao što su muško/žensko, duša /telo, kultura/priroda, nebo/zemlja, čovek/priroda. Ovaj rad ima za cilj da ukaže na značaj ekološke reformacije hrišćanske tradicije u suočavanju sa rastućom pretnjom od uništavanja životne sredine u savremenom svetu i da pokaže kako religija i književnost – kao snažni izvori kreativnog potencijala – mogu doprineti ekološkoj etici i održivom razvoju. U tom pogledu, ključno je vratiti se ekološkoj mudrosti utkanj u religiozne i književne i/ili religiozno inspirisane književne tekstove, tako što će se prema njima postupati obazrivo, uvek imajući u vidu širi kontekst njihovog nastajanja. Umesto uočavanja dualizama i njihovog tumačenja, čime se načelno zaoštrava jaz između radikalnih ekologa i radikalnih antropologa, u ovom radu se posebna pažnja posvećuje odbacivanju binarnih razlika. Podržavaju se ideje koje zastupaju pristalice četvrtog talasa ekokritike koje, kroz koncept transkorporalnosti, ukazuju na međusobnu povezanost i uslovljenost između čoveka i njegovog okruženja. Koncept transkorporalnosti se prvenstveno odnosi na ideju da se ljudsko telo i okolina/priroda, a po analogiji i ljudski um/duša i okruženje, ne mogu posmatrati kao posebni entiteti. Zahvaljujući ovom konceptu moguće je bolje razabrati suštinsku ideju ovog rada da su književnost, umetnost, religija i svi drugi oblici kulturnog izražavanja obnovljivi izvori energije koji imaju značajnu primenu na fizički svet i prirodu, a u pogledu njegove/njene zaštite. Na taj način ljudsko biće odoleva riziku da ostane zarobljeno u lancima ideologije koja počiva na dualizmima koji su prepreka kako ispoljavanju i razvijanju čovekove istinske duhovnosti i humanosti, tako i očuvanju ravnoteže i održivosti planete.*

Ključne reči: *ekokritika, transkorporalnost, telo/duša i priroda/sredina, književni i religijski tekstovi, ekološka etika*

Introduction to Ecocriticism

The concept of 'ecocriticism' emerged as a fascinating crossroads where the realms of ecology and literature intertwine, due to the innovative thinking of William Rueckert. His groundbreaking idea centered on weaving ecological principles into the fabric of literary analysis, as highlighted by Glotfelty (1996, xix). Even prior to Rueckert's pivotal step, the seeds of ecocriticism had been quietly sown through the exploration of 'nature themes' in literature, as Mazel (2001) aptly points out. Rueckert's influential contributions acted as a spark that ignited the interests of subsequent scholars in the realm of environmental humanities. This enthusiasm culminated in the landmark release of *The Ecocriticism Reader* in 1996, a turning point that firmly cemented ecocriticism's status as a bona fide academic discipline, a perspective shared by Scott Slovic (2017). Cheryl Glotfelty (1996, xvii) linked ecocriticism to studying the relationship between literature

and the physical environment, while Slovic (2000, p. 160) expanded this, encompassing the analysis of literary works with explicit environmental themes through diverse scholarly approaches. This entails investigating ecological implications and exploring the connections between humans and nature in any type of literary writing, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of the intricate connections between culture, the environment, and our collective imagination.

Lawrence Buell (2005, p. 17) introduced a wave-based historiography within ecocriticism by addressing the differentiation between the first and second waves in his work *The Future of Environmental Criticism*. There are no clear-cut boundaries between the waves, as each new wave is rather the extension of the previous one. Recent developments in the field indicate the rise of a 'Fifth wave of ecocriticism' that focuses on topics encompassing the handling of information, the cognitive aspects of information interpretation, and the effectiveness of diverse communication tactics, as proposed by Slovic (2019, p. 514). As ecocriticism continues to evolve, its interdisciplinary nature enhances our ability to explore and appreciate the intersections between human creativity, ecological consciousness, and the narratives that shape our perception of the world around us. This paper sets out to elucidate the impact of literary texts in shaping perceptions of environmental issues, with a particular focus on the fourth wave of ecocriticism (2008 to present), which emerged alongside the third wave. We seek to contribute to the ongoing dialogue on how literature and cultural expressions can serve as powerful tools for reshaping the power dynamic in environmental decision-making processes.

The emergence of the fourth wave represented a notable advancement closely associated with material ecocriticism, featuring dialogues that revolve around material feminism, trans-corporeality, and a renewed focus on the interconnectedness of human-nature connections (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008; Alaimo, 2010). As we embark on exploring this wave, we recognize the research by Škobo and Đukić (2022, 2022a, 2023), who have shed light on the significant role of literary texts in raising awareness about the connection between environmental illness and public health. Through their examination of J. G. Ballard's urban violence novels, these authors brought to the forefront the impact of urban landscapes on the physical, mental, and spiritual health of characters. Their research emphasizes the power of literature in influencing environmental decision-making, as they reveal how Ballard's urban violence novels portray societies in the West, where the detachment of individuals from nature is supplanted by a strong connection to the urban surroundings. Additionally, these societies depict a 'new age' spirituality that is guided by market forces, which have become standard (Škobo & Đukić, 2022, p. 91). By connecting the concepts of fourth-wave ecocriticism with the insights from Škobo and Đukić's research, we aim to deepen our understanding of

the interplay between religion, health, environment, and literature within the context of environmental decision-making. Furthermore, we explore the role of religion in environmental damage, crucial for comprehending the intricate dynamics between human societies and their ecological surroundings.

Deep Ecology, Anthropocentrism, Biocentrism; Ecocentrism

The first wave of ecocriticism (1980-present) predominantly relies on the concept of deep ecology in the core of which is the idea that the ecosystem precedes all living beings including humans (Rivkin & Ryan, 2017, p. 1512). Within literary studies, this wave focuses on ‘nature writing’, preserving the ecosystem and challenging the hierarchical relationship between humans and nature. It primarily centers on American and British literature, along with the exploration of “discursive ecofeminism” (Škobo and Đukić, 2022, p. 89). Deep ecology, as the foundation of the first wave of ecocriticism, rejects anthropocentric perspectives, advocating instead for viewing humans as equals with all other living entities. This approach seeks to overcome social structures hindering ecological harmony (Rivkin & Ryan, 2017, p. 1512). It underscores the notion of assigning equal intrinsic value to all organisms and emphasizes the interconnectedness between humans and the broader lifeworld (Callicott & Frodeman, 2009, p. 206). Conventional environmentalism, seen as an extension of North American and European anthropocentrism, is critiqued by eminent deep ecologists who argue that it tends to value nature solely for human benefit and treats nature as a commodity (see Callicott & Frodeman, 2009).

The first wave of ecocriticism is grounded in two fundamental principles: biocentric egalitarianism, promoting parity among all living entities, and metaphysical holism, which posits the absence of a clear demarcation between the human and nonhuman realms (Callicott & Frodeman, 2009, p. 207). To live in harmony with nature, individuals must recognize and appreciate the intrinsic value of all living things on Earth. However, these formulations have faced criticism, with Baird Callicott arguing that ecological ethics do not necessarily require bestowing equivalent value upon every individual living entity within the ecosphere. Additionally, some contend that biocentric egalitarianism and metaphysical holism are inconsistently related, leading to debates over the viability of deep ecology (Callicott & Frodeman, 2009, p. 208).

As opposed to deep ecology, anthropocentrism in environmental discourse gives priority to the human world over that of non-human, asserting that the value lies exclusively in human beings and their concerns (Clark, 2011, p. 3). This perspective, where the universe is perceived to be primarily designed for human benefit, has resulted in mankind’s indifference to and disconnection from nature, leading to devastation of natural resources.

While anthropocentrism revolves around the binary opposition between man and nature, biocentrism centers on nature itself, considering humans as an essential component of and belonging to the natural world, rather than dominating it (Tan, 2019, p. 30). From this standpoint, there is an emphasis on treating all living creatures with equivalent respect and honor (Johansson, 2012, p. 13). Therefore, the expectation is for human beings to show respect for the environment and demonstrate ethical behavior towards all living entities.

Ecocentrism, along with biocentrism, has gained significant popularity within environmental movements and finds its roots in ancient Eastern religions like Taoism and Buddhism. Moreover, ecocriticism is evident in figures revered in Christianity, such as St. Francis of Assisi and Teilhard de Chardin, as suggested by Garrard (2012, p. 25). At the heart of ecocentrism is the notion that all organisms are intricately connected to their surroundings and profoundly influenced by these environmental interconnections (Eckersley 1992, p. 49). This interconnectedness implies that there are no rigid boundaries between humans and nonhumans, humans and nature, and non-humans and nature (Tan, 2019, p. 33). In essence, ecocentrism advocates for the idea that nature dominates the Earth and all living beings, emphasizing the interdependence and equality among all elements of the natural world.

Ecocriticism emerged as a response to the recognition of the central role of the relationship between living organisms and the physical environment in addressing the global ecological crisis. Ecocritics firmly believe that human culture is inherently connected to the natural world, leading to the understanding that humans are inseparable from the environment, and vice versa. The fourth wave of ecocriticism, which is the focal point of this paper, revolves around similar notions and introduces the concept of 'trans-corporeality.' This concept highlights the inseparable link between the human body and the more-than-human world, challenging traditional dualisms that separate humans from the environment (Slovic, 2012, p. 443). As Stacy Alaimo (2010, p. 20) suggests, humans are integral components of the material and emergent world, interwoven inextricably with the fabric of nature. In this context, nature and the environment transcend being passive spaces or simple commodities for human exploitation; they are recognized as active agents in their own right. Alaimo's perspective prompts us to delve deeper into the mutual shaping of ourselves and our coexisting environments (Alaimo, 2010, p. 20). In this context, the human body, encompassing the mind and soul, is akin to an edifice of a trans-corporeal space, in constant interaction with its surroundings. The presence of toxic waste in the environment, resulting from human civilization and culture, has repercussions, as these pollutants are ingested and found within human bodies, reflecting the intertwined nature of human and environmental health (Škobo & Đukić, 2023). Thus, our

attitude towards the environment is deeply influenced by our belief systems, and the role of religiosity and spirituality in both rural and urban settings becomes pivotal in shaping environmental ethics and overall environmental well-being. In essence, the human body and mind continually negotiate with the 'more-than-human' world, warranting equal importance and consideration. The 'soul,' an integral part of the human body, also engages in a dialogue with the environment, as one's religious and spiritual inclinations adapt and react to the interaction between humans and nature; the degree to which one transcends the limitations of anthropocentrism plays a crucial role in shaping these dynamics (Škobo & Đukić, 2022, p. 88). As such, the understanding and recognition of the interconnectedness between the corporeal, psychological, and metaphysical dimensions of human beings and the environment are essential in fostering a more holistic and responsible approach towards environmental decision-making and ethics.

Disciplinary Intersection: Ecocriticism, Literature and Religion

Rueckert's significant impact on the realm of ecocriticism stems from his acknowledgement that literature possesses far more potential to enrich ecological thought than simply tracing 'nature themes' within literary texts (Slovic, 2017, p. 355). Scholars aware of the environmental crisis have long sought to explore how literary texts can offer insights into human behavior concerning the environment. Within the environmental humanities, studies in religion and ecology play a crucial role, as religion profoundly influences the environmental perspectives, values, interactions, as well as conduct of a considerable segment of society. Rueckert's idea of preserving 'cultural' energy is particularly noteworthy as it emphasizes that literature, art and all forms of cultural expression, including religion, are valuable and 'sustainable energy sources'. This concept can be meaningfully extended to the realm of the natural environment. Likewise, these ideas should be applied to humans' faith related beliefs, as religious texts, akin to literary texts, possess the potential to reshape the power dynamic in environmental decision-making regarding the use of natural resources.

Literary Texts as a Renewable Source of Energy

The ecocritical reading of William Wordsworth's poems supports the idea that he was one of the forerunners of British ecocriticism. His works reflect a deep love for the natural world and emphasize the interdependence between humans and nature. Wordsworth believed in the importance of reuniting with nature and living as part of it. In his poems, Wordsworth portrays nature not only for its beauty and power, but also as a source of psychological and physical well-being for human beings. A connection with religion is predominantly seen in his poetry

through meditative practices akin to various religious traditions. For example, in his poem “The Tables Turned,”² he urges readers to ‘quit the books’, ‘clear [their] looks’ and immerse themselves in nature, establishing a link between the ‘heart’ and ‘mind’ and ‘heart’ and ‘soul,’ supporting his belief in nature’s power, which he sees as equivalent to that of God. Nature, for Wordsworth, assumes the role of a religion, surpassing all other forces and sources of wisdom. His poetry weaves together the concepts of man, nature, and God, often personifying God in the diverse forms of nature. For instance, in one of his sonnets from the collection *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1807), he alludes to a powerful entity in perpetual movement, producing a sound akin to thunder, representing the ocean’s divine force (see Roberts, 2015, p. 260).

In his poem “Tintern Abbey,” the poet expresses nature’s formative role in man’s stages of development by recounting his early experiences of nature. On the other hand, in the poem “The Rainbow, My Heart Leaps,” the poet emphasizes the close relationship between nature and human beings. He uses his experiences of the rainbow as a symbol of nature, which he encountered in his youth “when [his] life began,” and contrasts it with his experience in adulthood: “so is it now [he is] a man.” The changing perception of the rainbow as he grows up can be symbolically interpreted as the corruption of nature caused by the encroachment of culture in the context of industrial advancement.

Wordsworth’s poems serve as a warning about the environmental issues prevalent during the Industrial Revolution. His frustration with human’s treatment of nature and his critique of the First Industrial Revolution are evident in the poem “The World is Too Much with Us” (1807). In this poem, the poet laments over the way that human beings “lay waste [their] powers;/ Little we see in Nature that is ours; / We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!”. Within the context of the fourth wave of ecocriticism and the notion of trans-corporeality, the poem challenges the idea of humans as separate from nature. The advancements in science and technology led people to become consumed with consumerism, losing touch with the natural world and its spiritual significance. The poem reflects various losses experienced by humanity: the loss of feelings (“we have given our hearts away”), the loss of connection between humans and the natural environment (“Little we see in Nature that is ours”), and the loss of creative power (“we lay waste our powers”). The human body, according to the fourth-wave ecocriticism, is not a “a bounded entity, but rather open and permeable, interfacing with a range of environmental elements” (Alaimo, 2016, p. 3). Our bodily experiences – shaped by the landscapes we inhabit– molds our ecological understanding (Alaimo, 2014, p. 161).

2 The source cited for all of Wordsworth’s poems mentioned in the paper is the book entitled *The Collected Poems of William Wordsworth*, published by Wordsworth Editions Limited in 1994.

Wordsworth's poetry can be seen as a call to re-establish a connection with the non-human realm and recognize the profound impact of the environment on human existence. It suggests that the demarcations between human and non-human entities are flexible, and humans are intricately woven into the fabric of the natural world. The notion of transcorporeality further underscores this interconnectedness, emphasizing the evolution of boundaries between human and non-human entities through their interactions (Barad 2007, p. 383). In Wordsworth's verses, this notion is expressed through his depictions of how the natural world shapes and influences human beings, accentuating the porous nature of the divisions between human and non-human entities.

The poem "The World is Too Much with Us" can also be interpreted as a critique of capitalist systems that prioritize economic growth and profit over environmental protection and sustainability. The excessive focus on materialism and consumption has led to a disregard for the natural world and its resources. Additionally, when viewed through the lens of social justice inherent in fourth-wave ecocriticism, the poem highlights the interconnectedness of environmental issues with race, gender, and class (Garrard, 2012, p. 238). It criticizes the exploitation of the natural world and its resources by those in power, particularly at the expense of marginalized communities who bear the brunt of environmental degradation.

Wordsworth's poetry showcases ecological sensitivity and indigenous wisdom, encouraging us not to overlook the profound meaning in ordinary experience and phenomena, such as appreciating the sacredness of water. The poet's preference for spiritual paganism though "suckled in a creed outworn," rather than being a spiritually disconnected religious individual, suggests that religion holds meaning when it aligns with one's emotional and intellectual experiences. Any duality disrupts harmony. In this context, religion is grounded in the body, feelings, and the "motion of our human blood" (*Tintern Abbey*, line 45). Nature is an inherent part of our inner selves, regardless of the rise of technology and science. Human beings are inherently connected to nature, both in life and death, as seen in Wordsworth's *Lucy* poems, where his deceased lover, Lucy, remains a part of the natural environment.

In Wordsworth's poetry, religion symbolizes the recognition that various dimensions of life, such as the natural, moral, social, and political facets, are not isolated entities, but interconnected elements within a unified existence (Roberts, 2015, p. 264). It serves as a means through which humans unveil the ongoing connections within existence that have, at times, seemed fragmented due to self-centeredness, individuality, cultural distortions, and rationality (264). For Wordsworth, poetry (and religion respectively) has the responsibility of addressing the challenge of integrating one's emotions, bodily experiences,

environmental consciousness, and interpersonal relationships. His insistence on intertwining individual identity, the environment, and fellow humans, remains relevant in the modern world, where challenges like overpopulation and environmental crises loom large. His call to return to nature extends beyond the notion that technology hinders our engagement with the planet; it stands as a compelling prompt to enhance our connection with the natural world.

Should we embrace the concept of trans-corporeality, emphasizing the intricate link between human bodies and the environment, we must acknowledge the unsustainability of all dichotomous divisions, such as human/nature, culture/nature, man/woman, body/mind, and body/soul. This perspective extends to our comprehension of the association between the environment/nature and the human mind/soul, as articulated by Škobo and Đukić in their study (2022). Put differently, the state of one's mental and spiritual well-being is prone to be impacted by the health of the built environment (see Škobo & Đukić, 2022). Therefore, it is essential not to overlook the contributions made by researchers in literary studies, as well as within religious studies, in the field of environmental humanities, as we contemplate the possibilities of creating a more sustainable world.

Christianity, Religious Texts and Environmental Ethics

Religion and spirituality hold a significant ethical dimension within ecocriticism, as they contribute to our understanding of the ecosystem and the intricate relationship between humans and the non-human world. Rigby (2017, p. 273) contends that the study of religion and ecology within the environmental humanities illuminates how religion greatly shapes the environmental outlooks, values, interactions, and behaviors of a substantial portion of the global population. Scholars exploring the intersection of religion and ecology offer critical insights into how the natural environment influences religious practices and beliefs, and conversely, how religious perspectives can impact environmental stewardship and sustainability (Baumann et al., 2011, p. 8). Understanding these dynamics is crucial in addressing environmental challenges and fostering a more sustainable world.

Religious organizations can, at times, perpetuate systems of oppression, contradicting their own teachings through corrupt practices. However, the symbolism and motivations arising from religious beliefs can also serve as a potent force of opposition against oppression, as evidenced in historical instances like the abolition of slavery and the prohibition of animal cruelty. These initiatives were shaped by the principles of Christian teachings centered on fairness and empathy. In literate societies, sacred texts serve as repositories of history, culture, and behavioral norms, making it imperative to approach them with caution, contextual understanding, and discerning reinterpretation (Rigby, 2017, p. 275). The aim of this paper is not to favor one religion, particularly Christianity, as the sole focus

of our research. Similar to the diversity found in languages, religions also differ, and it would not be prudent to challenge their authenticity or superiority (Eaton, 2014, p. 215). The paper's objective is to highlight the impact of religious beliefs on the development of environmental ethics, with the special focus on illustrating how Christianity, with its vast global influence as of 2014, boasting over 3.2 billion followers constituting over 31.5 % of the world's population (Rigby, 2017, p. 273), can significantly contribute not only to mental health and spiritual well-being of individuals, but also to the well-being of the environment.

The idea that monotheistic religions at their core promote the belief that humans are created in God's image is explored in Butchvarov's work *Anthropocentrism in Philosophy*. According to Butchvarov (2015, p. 6), monotheistic religions offer the certainty of humans' distinct origin and exceptional position within the natural world. This notion of human exceptionalism and Western anthropocentrism, particularly in Western Christianity, and its connection to the origins of the environmental crisis, were discussed by Lynn White Jr. in his essay "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis" (1967). White argues that Christianity, with its belief in human domination over all creatures, including nature, fostered anthropocentric values (Sessions, 1995, x). However, White's essay also advocates for a reevaluation of humanity's purpose by turning to the teachings of St. Francis, who advocated the equality of all living creatures (White, 1967, p. 1206). The proto-ecocritical dimension of White's essay, centered around the idea of human dominion over nature, was recognized by ecocritics and included in the first anthology in the field of literary ecology, *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996). Kate Rigby (2017, p. 276) argues that White's essay extends beyond his criticism of Christianity and its influence on the anthropocentric mindset. She highlights the importance of White's perspective that religion serves as a foundational catalyst for shifts in the environment (Rigby, 277-278). Furthermore, Rigby interprets White's statement that Christianity carries significant culpability for the industrial degradation of the earth as a fertile ground for further development of ecocritical thought and the exploration of ecospiritual alternatives to Christianity.

According to White's assessment, Christianity is regarded as the most human-centered religion, attributing a dualistic separation between humanity and nature while advocating for the exploitation of nature for human benefit as part of God's will (White, 1967, p. 1205). The onset of the Industrial Revolution brought about significant technological advancements that led medieval European farmers to view themselves as masters of nature, reinforcing the notion of human dominance (White, 1967, p. 1205). This interpretation was often linked to biblical passages such as the mandate to 'subdue the earth' (Gen. 1.26–1.28). White acknowledges the profound influence of Western Christian attitudes on the development and consequences of modern science and technology in shaping humanity's relationship

with the natural world. He emphasizes that the roots of the environmental crisis are deeply entwined with religious beliefs, thereby proposing that any solution to these issues must have a religious component, whether explicitly labeled as such or not. White (1967, p. 1206) advocates for a reevaluation and reassessment of our understanding of human nature and destiny in light of the ecological challenges we face.

Rigby takes the argument a step further by emphasizing the significance of socio-economic factors and the consequences of environmental degradation that are deeply ingrained in modern ideologies, which White's essay does not adequately acknowledge. Namely, she emphasizes that the exploitation of both human labor and the domination of other beings are deeply interconnected aspects of the industrial capitalist system (Rigby, 2017, p. 279). Likewise, as Rigby points out, the same ideologies and systems that perpetuate environmental exploitation often extend to the oppression of vulnerable populations, including women, animals, and marginalized individuals.

White's recognition of the duality between humans and nature, as well as the prevalent anthropocentrism in human mentality, holds crucial significance in our comprehension of the intricate relationship between human and the 'more-than-human' world, which is the central focus of this paper. Just as humans interact with and transform the natural environment into urban landscapes, the environment in turn exerts its influence, reshaping and affecting the human body (including its mind and soul, as integral components). Similarly, religion, as a system of beliefs and practices connecting humanity to transcendental and supernatural elements, is also shaped by the natural environment and its degradation. Acknowledging the deep interconnection between humans and the 'more-than-human' world, as indicated in the notion of human 'dominion' and the responsibility to 'till and to keep' (Gen. 2.15) the environment, challenges the binary notions of body and nature, body and mind, body and soul, and eventually, soul and nature. By rejecting these dichotomies (such as man-nature, body-soul), we can explore the relationship between human and nonhuman entities in a new light. This approach aligns with White's proposal for the profound transformation of Christianity to embrace environmental concerns, and the applicability of this idea to other faith traditions as well. Rigby (2017, p. 281) highlights that all religious traditions need re-interpretation and imaginative transformation to establish a robust environmental ethic founded on a holistic vision of humans existing within the environment. Indeed, people's attitudes and actions towards their ecology are intrinsically linked to how they perceive themselves in relation to the world around them (White, 1967, p. 1205). Therefore, to pinpoint the main origin of human attitudes towards the natural environment, it is essential to examine the prevailing religious practices within Western societies that influenced economic progress and subsequently contributed to the emergence of the eco-crisis.

As a response to socio-ecological concerns, the modern era has witnessed the emergence of inter-religious environmental initiatives (Rigby, 2017, p. 283). One recent religious text that stands as a source of creative energy capable of reshaping the power dynamic in environmental decision-making regarding the use of natural resources is Pope Francis' May 2015 encyclical, *Laudato si* (Praise be to you). It represents a significant development in Christian environmental thought, as it emphasizes the interconnectedness between the environment and human society and calls for a more responsible and sustainable approach to environmental issues. Notably, in the paragraph 138, the Pope underscores the necessity of recognizing the inherent value of all living beings and the environment, extending beyond their mere utilitarian value to humans. This recognition reinforces our deep bond with nature, encapsulated by the notion that "we ourselves are dust of the earth", with our bodies composed of its elements, and our sustenance drawn from its air and waters.

White's vision of a 'democracy of all creatures,' drawn from biblical passages like Daniel 3:57–3:90 and Psalms 104 and 148, envisions a united praise for the creator, encompassing all living and non-living beings. Likewise, the theme of praising the creator is reiterated in the initial paragraph of *Laudato si*, where Earth is affectionately termed as both 'sister' and 'mother' (2015, 3). Pope Francis addresses the encyclical not only to Catholics or Christians, but to every individual (2015, 4), emphasizing its universal significance. The Pope further pays tribute to his namesake, St. Francis of Assisi, as a 'mystic' who had a profound communion with all creation and championed justice for the poor (2015, 9-10). In interpreting St. Francis' stance, Pope Francis calls for a rejection of the mentality that sees reality merely as an object for human use and control (2015, 11), seeking a return to spiritual connection with the divine, fellow humans, and all living beings (2015, 175). This perspective emphasizes the interconnectedness of humans with their environment and stresses the importance of caring for the natural world as an extension of our own being.

The encyclical goes beyond fixed boundaries between human and non-human entities, as Pope Francis encourages believers to see the world not from an external standpoint but from within, acknowledging the intrinsic bonds that link humanity with all other beings (2015, 220). Finally, the Pope's encyclical, White's essay, and Wordsworth's poem "The World is Too Much for Us" critique environmental degradation is a consequence of human actions. They address the culture of consumerism and its detrimental impact on the environment by promoting a culture of waste, embodied in excessive consumption and ownership of material possessions.

Final Remarks

The ethical dimension is paramount in understanding the ecosystem and the relationship between humans and the non-human world. Religion, being culturally influential, plays a significant role in shaping secular attitudes and institutions in modern societies. It is not only shaped by the environment but can also be influenced by environmental degradation.

The integration of literary and religious texts, combined with the fourth-wave ecocritical approaches, offers powerful tools for reshaping the power dynamic in environmental decision-making. This approach enables us to transcend the boundaries between human and non-human, and between the body/self and the environment. In ecocritical analyses of literary and religious texts, the depiction of the body as a tangible connection to the environment offers a platform for interconnected subjectivities that are part of the environment, not separate from it (Mortimer-Sandilands, 2018, p. 267). Through this perspective, humans recognize the ways in which their bodies and environments are co-constituted, empowering them to envision more sustainable, just, and interconnected ways of living in the world.

The notion of transcorporeality brings into focus the idea of conserving 'cultural' vitality, recognizing that literature and religion, as forms of cultural expression, serve as sustainable energy sources that can be effectively applied to the physical world of nature. Wordsworth's poetry challenges the traditional dualistic view of humans being separate from nature and advocates for a more meaningful relationship with the environment. Similarly, Lynn Jr. White's essay and Pope Francis's *Laudato Si* emphasize the interconnectedness of all living beings, stressing the importance of a responsible and sustainable approach to environmental decision-making. Incorporating such texts into environmental discourse enables a shift from a human-centric view of the world to a more holistic understanding of the natural environment, fostering more responsible and sustainable choices regarding the use of natural resources and prioritizing the well-being of all living beings. Furthermore, literary and religious texts play a vital role in challenging power structures that prioritize economic gain over environmental protection. By giving voice to marginalized communities and ecosystems, these texts can expose and confront the injustices inherent in many environmental decision-making processes.

To address the unique challenges of urban environments, it is essential to expand the application of these literary and religious concepts. By incorporating urban-centric literary and religious texts into environmental discourse, we can emphasize the interdependence between urban landscapes and the broader ecological community, thereby fostering a deeper sense of environmental responsibility among urban dwellers, encouraging them to consider the impact of their

actions on the urban ecosystem and beyond. Additionally, religious texts that emphasize stewardship and reverence for the natural world can play a crucial role in shaping urban environmental ethics, nurturing a more sustainable and ecologically conscious approach to urban development, and ultimately benefiting both public health and the harmonious coexistence of body, soul, and the environment.

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