



RETHINKING ANTHROPOCENTRISM: A DEEP ECOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF MODERN LIFE IN HANIF KUREISHI'S *MAGGIE*

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Abstract:

This study examines Hanif Kureishi's short story Maggie (2007) through deep ecological perspective to explore how anthropocentric thinking shapes modern life and limits ecological awareness. The study employs Arne Naess, a Norwegian philosopher's term of "deep ecology", a philosophical and environmental movement first articulated in his seminal work "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement (1973)" that calls for a radical shift in the way humans view their relationship with nature. Using close textual analysis, the study focuses on how the narrative presents materialism, social authority, and personal desire as dominant forces that influence human behavior and relationships. The study argues that the narrative critiques consumer culture and conventional social structures, these critiques do not fully move beyond human-centered thinking. The story reflects a tension between recognizing the problems of modern life and achieving a deeper ecological understanding. It is difficult to shift from a worldview based on control and consumption to one based on connection and balance. The study highlights the need for a shift in human values toward a more interconnected and ecologically aware way of living. It also contributes to eco-critical discussions by showing how literature can reveal both the limitations of anthropocentric thinking and the challenges involved in moving beyond it.

Keywords: Anthropocentrism, Consumerism, Deep Ecology, Ecocriticism, Modernity, Environmental Consciousness, Urban Life

INTRODUCTION

Deep ecology (1973), as a significant development within environmental thought, offers a sustained critique of the anthropocentric assumptions that have historically shaped Western philosophical and cultural traditions. First articulated by Arne Naess in his seminal essay "*The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement*" (1973), deep ecology calls for a radical reorientation of human consciousness, emphasizing the intrinsic value of all living beings irrespective of their utility to humans. This position is further elaborated by Bill Devall and George Sessions (1985), who argue for a transformation of ethical, social, and economic systems in order to foster a more ecologically balanced mode of existence. In this sense, deep ecology moves beyond reformist environmentalism and instead advocates a fundamental restructuring of the human-nature relationship grounded in interconnectedness, equality, and respect for all forms of life.

The critique of anthropocentrism advanced by deep ecology also resonates with broader eco-critical discourse. Lawrence Buell (1995) and Greg Garrard (2012) emphasize the role of literature in both reflecting and interrogating dominant environmental ideologies, particularly the reduction of nature to a passive resource within modern industrial societies. Similarly, Val Plumwood (1993) critiques the dualistic logic that separates humans from nature, arguing that such



divisions underpin systems of domination and ecological exploitation. Within this theoretical framework, literary texts become crucial sites for examining how anthropocentric values are constructed, contested, and potentially transformed. In this context, the works of Hanif Kureishi, particularly *Maggie*, offer a compelling terrain for eco-critical inquiry. Although Kureishi's writing has predominantly been examined through postcolonial and socio-cultural lenses (Ranasinha 2002; Kaleta 1998), it also engages albeit implicitly with ecological concerns embedded in modern life. The narrative's exploration of identity, alienation, and existential dissatisfaction reflects what Timothy Morton (2007) describes as the “*ecological thought*,” wherein the boundaries between human and non-human life are destabilized, revealing a deeper sense of interconnectedness. At the same time, the text illustrates how modern subjectivity remains entangled within consumerist and anthropocentric frameworks, thereby limiting the possibility of genuine ecological awareness.

Therefore, the present study examine how the narrative negotiates the tension between anthropocentric values and emerging ecological consciousness in Hanif Kureishi's selected short story. By focusing on the character's experiences, desires, and interpersonal dynamics, the study highlights the ways in which individual identity is shaped by broader socio-economic and ideological structures that prioritize consumption, authority, and inequality. Both Max's existential disillusionment and Maggie's yearning for transformation can be understood as responses to a system that privileges material success over ecological and relational harmony. This study seeks to examine *Maggie's* functions as a microcosm of the broader ecological crisis, wherein personal, social, and environmental dimensions are deeply interconnected. By analyzing the narrative through deep ecology, it raises critical questions about the necessity of moving beyond human-centered paradigms toward a more holistic understanding of life as an interconnected community. In doing so, the study underscores the importance of reimagining human agency not as a force of domination, but as a potential site for cultivating ecological awareness and fostering more sustainable and ethically grounded relationships with the natural world.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Anthropocentrism is the belief that human beings occupy a central and privileged position in the world, has been rigorously critiqued within environmental philosophy and Eco critical literary studies. Thinkers such as Lynn White Jr. argue that the roots of ecological crisis lie in Western ideological traditions that elevate human dominion over nature (White, 1967). Similarly, Val Plumwood (1993) critiques the dualistic logic of Western thought that separates humans from the natural world, reinforcing structures of domination. Kate Soper (1995) further examines anthropocentrism as a cultural construct embedded in modern consumer societies, where nature is reduced to a resource for human exploitation. Within literary studies, Lawrence Buell (1995) highlights how texts reflect and challenge anthropocentric assumptions, arguing that literature plays a crucial role in reshaping environmental consciousness.

Deep ecology, as articulated by Arne Naess (1973), offers a radical alternative to anthropocentrism by asserting the intrinsic value of all living beings, independent of their utility to humans. Naess's concept of “bio spherical egalitarianism” calls for an ethical shift toward recognizing the interconnectedness of all forms of life. This framework is further developed by Bill Devall and George Sessions (1985), who advocate for a transformation of human consciousness and lifestyle to align with ecological principles. Warwick Fox (1990) extends deep



ecology into transpersonal ecology, emphasizing identification with the wider ecological self. In literary discourse, Cheryll Glotfelty (1996) positions ecocriticism as a means of examining the relationship between literature and the physical environment, often foregrounding deep ecological values.

Modernity has been widely examined as a driving force behind ecological alienation, particularly through processes such as industrialization, urbanization, and technological expansion. Max Weber (1905) conceptualizes modernity as a process of rationalization that disenchant the natural world, reducing it to calculable and exploitable matter. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1944) critique Enlightenment rationality for fostering instrumental reason, which legitimizes domination over nature. In eco-critical contexts, Timothy Morton (2007) introduces the concept of “ecological thought” to challenge the illusion of human separateness from nature, while Raymond Williams (1973) explores how cultural narratives of the “country” and the “city” reflect shifting human-nature relations. Literary texts that engage with modernity often depict fragmented identities and a profound sense of ecological dislocation, thereby critiquing anthropocentric assumptions embedded in contemporary life.

The works of Hanif Kureishi including *Maggie* have primarily been analyzed through postcolonial and socio-cultural lenses, focusing on themes of identity, migration, and hybridity (Ranasinha, 2002; Kaleta, 1998). However, Kureishi’s narratives also gesture toward ecological concerns, particularly in their depiction of alienation, excess, and moral disorientation within modern urban settings. In *Maggie*, these elements can be interpreted through a deep ecological framework, revealing the subtle critique of anthropocentric values that prioritize individual desire and material consumption over ecological balance. Such readings align with Greg Garrard (2012), who emphasizes the importance of identifying environmental subtexts in seemingly non-environmental literature.

Furthermore, Kureishi’s engagement with postcolonial discourse intersects with ecological critique by challenging dominant Western paradigms, including anthropocentrism. Edward Said (1978) and Homi K. Bhabha (1994) critique Eurocentric frameworks that marginalize both colonized peoples and non-human nature. Rob Nixon (2011) introduces the concept of “slow violence” to highlight how environmental degradation disproportionately affects marginalized communities, thereby linking ecological and social injustices. This intersectional approach is further supported by Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin (2010), who argue that postcolonial ecocriticism exposes the interconnectedness of environmental exploitation and colonial power structures. Through this lens, *Maggie* can be read as a text that not only critiques modern anthropocentrism but also situates ecological concerns within broader discourses of power, identity, and cultural negotiation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a qualitative, interpretive research methodology grounded in textual analysis to examine *Maggie* by Hanif Kureishi (2007). The research employs a close reading approach to analyze the narrative, focusing on themes, language, and representations that reflect anthropocentric attitudes and their ecological implications.

3.1 Purpose and Focus of the Study

This study is guided by a set of interrelated research questions that seek to critically examine the representation of anthropocentrism and its ecological implications in *Maggie* by Hanif



Kureishi. It asks how the text constructs and problematizes an anthropocentric worldview within the context of modern urban life, and in what ways this worldview contributes to ecological alienation and ethical disconnection from the non-human world. Furthermore, the study explores how the narrative can be interpreted through the lens of deep ecology, particularly drawing on the ideas of Arne Naess, to reveal an implicit critique of human-centered values and to foreground notions of interconnectedness and intrinsic worth of all life forms. It also investigates how Kureishi's engagement with modernity which is marked by consumerism, individualism, and existential crisis. It also reinforces or destabilizes anthropocentric assumptions. Finally, the study considers how the intersection of ecological concerns with postcolonial perspectives broadens the critique, demonstrating how issues of power, identity, and cultural hybridity intersect with environmental ethics in the narrative.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the theoretical framework of deep ecology, a philosophical and environmental movement first articulated by Arne Naess in his seminal work *The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement* (1973). Deep ecology proposes a radical reorientation of human perception of nature, shifting from an anthropocentric to an ecocentric worldview. It asserts the intrinsic value of all living beings, independent of their usefulness to humans, and calls for the preservation of ecological systems and biodiversity as ethical imperatives. The framework is further informed by Bill McKibben's *The End of Nature* (1990), which critically examines the extent of human intervention in the natural world and argues that contemporary environmental crises have fundamentally altered the idea of "nature" as something separate and autonomous. McKibben's perspective reinforces the deep ecological concern that human activity has disrupted ecological balance to such an extent that nature can no longer be understood outside the scope of human influence. Central to deep ecology is the principle of eco-centrism, which rejects anthropocentrism and instead emphasizes the interconnectedness and interdependence of all forms of life. Within this paradigm, humans are understood as one component of a larger ecological network rather than its dominant or superior entity. Accordingly, ethical responsibility extends beyond human interests to include the well-being of entire ecosystems. This study employs this ecocentric framework to analyze how literary texts represent and interrogate human-nature relationships, particularly in the context of modern environmental crisis and cultural attitudes toward nature.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The story revolves around a conversation between two major characters "Max and Maggie". Max's life, which revolves around consumerism, material wealth, and detachment from the natural world, exemplifies an anthropocentric worldview. He sees nature as a resource to be consumed rather than as something that exists independently of human interest. This lifestyle promotes a sense of individualism and ownership. It relates to *Deep Ecology*, which emphasizes the intrinsic value of nature and the interconnectedness of all life forms. On the other hand, Maggie offers a potential indication of a more ecocentric perspective through her reflections on poverty, social work, and her dissatisfaction with the current way of life. The juxtaposition of these two perspectives provides a critical framework for exploring how deep ecology interrogates the limits of human-centered thinking and emphasizes the ethical and philosophical significance of ecological interconnectedness.



4.1 Max's Perspective on the Environment

Max's character is a representation of an entrenched anthropocentric worldview shaped by material accumulation, ownership, and ecological detachment. The narrative constructs his subjectivity through a persistent emphasis on possession, as evident in his assertion: "I've begun to collect art and photographs... Now I think, this is mine, mine, and I've earned it" (14) it is showing that the repetition of "mine" is particularly significant, as it linguistically reinforces an acquisitive logic in which identity and value are produced through ownership rather than relational engagement with the more-than-human world. Such possessive individualism reflects a "shallow ecological" consciousness that reduces nature and culture alike to objects of human appropriation. This orientation is revealing Max's sense of self, constructed within a framework that privileges control, accumulation, and separation, thereby displacing any recognition of ecological interdependence. This consumerist logic is further reinforced through Max's display of material success, particularly his car: "Max was keen to show off the car" (18) here, the act of "showing off" positions the car not merely as a means of transport but as a symbolic extension of status, mobility, and social validation. However, beneath this celebratory surface lies an implicit ecological contradiction, as the car also signifies the environmental costs associated with fossil-fuel consumption and modern industrial life. In this sense, Max's attachment to consumer goods reflects what deep ecologists identify as an anthropocentric value system that prioritizes human comfort and prestige over ecological sustainability. In everyday objects of desire are embedded within broader structures of environmental degradation, even when they are socially normalized and culturally celebrated.

Moreover, Max's pride in institutional recognition further consolidates his alignment with human-centered systems of authority and legitimacy: "I didn't show you the pictures of me receiving my OBE from the Queen" (22) this moment highlights his investment in symbolic structures of prestige that validate individual success within hierarchical social orders. In line with Plumwood's critique of hierarchical dualisms, such systems not only elevate certain human subjects but also reinforce a broader logic of domination that extends to the natural world. Consequently, Max's identity is shaped by both material acquisition and institutional recognition, each reinforcing a worldview in which value is externally conferred through power structures rather than internally grounded in ecological or ethical relationality. The narrative further intensifies this critique through sensory imagery associated with his car: "The roof of the car slid open and the sound boomed into the street" (19) here, the auditory imagery of "boomed" disrupts any sense of environmental harmony, instead evoking intrusion, excess, and spatial domination. This aligns with Theodor Adorno (1944) and Max Horkheimer's concept of instrumental reason, wherein nature is rendered an object of calculation, manipulation, and control rather than a living system of relations. The car's presence thus becomes emblematic of modernity's extractive and disruptive ecological logic, transforming space into something to be traversed, consumed, and acoustically dominated.

Taken together, Max's lifestyle encapsulates the broader ecological consequences of anthropocentric modernity, including alienation from nature, intensification of consumption, and normalization of environmental disregard. His character thereby functions not only as an individual representation but also as a critical figure through which the narrative exposes the ideological foundations of ecological crisis within contemporary consumer culture.



4.2 Maggie's Perspective on Nature

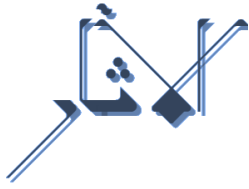
In contrast to Max, Maggie's perspective indicates an emergent but still partially developed ecological sensitivity shaped by her engagement with rural spaces and socially marginalized communities. Her remark: "You would not believe the poverty down there. It's another country, which means it's dull, and my work is repetitive" (27) reflects an initial recognition of socio-economic disparity that can be read as intersecting with environmental conditions. While the statement is framed through a tone of distance and mild detachment, it nevertheless exposes uneven lived realities shaped by structural neglect and resource deprivation. In this regard, her observation aligns indirectly with Rob Nixon (2011)'s concept of "slow violence," which describes how environmental degradation accumulates gradually and disproportionately affects marginalized populations. However, Maggie's framing of rural space as "dull" simultaneously reveals the persistence of an urban-centric gaze, suggesting that her ecological awareness remains mediated by cultural bias and limited affective engagement with place. Maggie also expressed desire for change: "For a while I've thought I should change my life" (29) signals dissatisfaction with the structures and rhythms of modern, consumer-oriented existence. This impulse can be interpreted as an initial movement away from the logic of commodified living toward a search for alternative forms of meaning and relationality. Within the framework of deep ecology, such a desire resonates with the call for a fundamental transformation in values, where human fulfillment is no longer defined primarily through economic productivity or consumption.

Nevertheless, the narrative does not yet fully translate this impulse into an articulated ecological consciousness, leaving her transformation at the level of personal reorientation rather than systemic critique. This ambivalence becomes more apparent in her willingness to relinquish economic stability: "I want to leave my job and home and come down here to live... I'll get a job" (31) while this yearning suggests a rejection of secure professional and domestic structures associated with capitalist modernity, it simultaneously reveals an unresolved dependence on the same economic framework she appears to resist. Her desire for relocation and change is thus primarily experiential and individual rather than explicitly ecological, indicating that her critique of modern life has not yet developed into a coherent ecocentric position. At a more reflective level, Maggie's questioning of normative social organization: "What was the need for people to disappear into different families?" (33) introduces a critical interrogation of fixed, human-centered institutions that regulate identity, belonging, and relational life. This challenge to conventional familial structures exposes their constructed and exclusionary nature, suggesting an openness to more fluid and less hierarchical forms of social existence. This perspective resonates with Warwick Fox (1990)'s concept of the expanded ecological self, which emphasizes the dissolution of rigid boundaries between self and other in favor of a more interconnected ontology.

However, while Maggie's reflections gesture toward relational openness, remains largely confined to human social arrangements rather than extending explicitly to non-human nature. Her stance therefore occupies an intermediate position: it destabilizes certain anthropocentric assumptions within social life but does not yet fully articulate an ecological ethics grounded in the intrinsic value of the more-than-human world.

4.3 Eco-centric Critique of Modern Life

The dialogue between Max and Maggie functions as a critical site through which the narrative interrogates the social foundations of modern life, while simultaneously revealing their



ecological undercurrents. Maggie's reflection: "Has not it occurred to you lately, what a conventional age we are living in now? I mean, of coercive ideals, the tyranny of the closed" (35) articulates a clear dissatisfaction with rigid normative structures that govern contemporary existence. Although her critique is primarily framed in socio-cultural terms, it resonates with Timothy Morton (2007)'s argument that modernity sustains illusions of separateness, control, and mastery that ultimately underpin ecological crisis. In this sense, the "closed" systems she critiques can be read as extending beyond social institutions to include epistemological frameworks that sever humans from ecological entanglement. Similarly, the observation: "Joe thinks it is all stupidity, consumerism, and self-hatred down here..." (37) Directly engages with the logic of consumer culture as a destructive social force. This critique aligns with Greg Garrard (2012)'s identification of consumerism as a central driver of environmental degradation within late modern societies. While the statement foregrounds psychological and social discontent, it also implicitly gestures toward the broader ecological consequences of consumption-driven economies, where material excess is structurally linked to environmental depletion. Maggie's desire to "explore places and people" suggests an aspiration to move beyond these restrictive frameworks toward a more open and experiential mode of existence; however, the extent to which this exploration develops into ecological awareness remains conceptually underdeveloped within the narrative.

Furthermore, Maggie's rejection of hierarchical authority: "Why cannot each individual have authority? We're not all children" (40) complicates the text's critique of modern structures. This statement echoes the concerns of deep ecology in its resistance to domination-based systems that privilege hierarchy, control, and exclusion. By questioning patriarchal and institutional authority, Maggie indirectly destabilizes the ideological foundations that also sustain anthropocentric thinking. Nevertheless, the narrative does not extend this critique into a fully articulated ecocentric ethic, thereby limiting its philosophical and ecological scope. Finally, Max's remark: "I am well done with that. It's too costly a pleasure" (42) introduces an implicit reflection on the unsustainability of contemporary lifestyles. The notion of "cost" can be interpreted beyond its economic register to include ecological consequences, suggesting an unacknowledged awareness of the environmental burden embedded in modern consumption. However, this recognition remains fragmentary and does not translate into substantive transformation. The subsequent reference to his reading glasses further reinforces this limitation, indicating that such insights remain superficial and fail to generate sustained ecological consciousness or ethical reorientation.

4.4 Maggie's Call for Radical Change

Maggie's articulation of dissatisfaction with contemporary life evolves into a more explicit call for transformation that resonates with deep ecology principles. Her question: "What happened to play, to wildness and experiment?" (44) Foregrounds a critique of modernity's restrictive and instrumental logic that suppresses spontaneity, creativity, and organic modes of being. The triadic emphasis on "play," "wildness," and "experiment" signals a longing for a mode of existence that transcends rigid social structures and reconnects with the vitality of nature. This aligns closely with the philosophy of Arne Naess, who advocated for a transformation of human consciousness that embraces diversity, fluidity, and ecological harmony.

Maggie's invocation of "wildness" is particularly significant in eco-critical terms, as it challenges the domestication and control inherent to anthropocentric culture. As Morton suggests,



modern society often constructs nature as something external and subordinate, thereby erasing the inherent interconnectedness between human and non-human life. Maggie's desire to reclaim "wildness" can thus be read as an attempt to dissolve these boundaries and reimagine the self as part of a broader ecological network that includes nonhuman animals. Her emphasis on "experiment" further implies a willingness to disrupt normative patterns of living, echoing deep ecology's call for radical lifestyle changes that move beyond consumerism toward ecological sustainability. Moreover, Maggie's critique implicitly challenges what Marcuse terms the "one-dimensional" nature of advanced industrial society, where human desires are shaped and constrained by capitalist imperatives. Her longing for alternative forms of experience reflects a resistance to this homogenization and opens the possibility of a more authentic, ecologically attuned existence. In this sense, her perspective represents not merely personal dissatisfaction but a broader philosophical stance that questions the foundations of modernity.

However, while Maggie's vision gestures toward a radical reconfiguration of human-nature relationships, it remains largely aspirational in the novel. Her critique lacks a fully articulated ecological framework and does not explicitly address the structural changes required to achieve such a transformation. As a result, her call for "play" and "wildness," though evocative, operates more as symbolic resistance to anthropocentrism than as a concrete ecological alternative. Nevertheless, Maggie's position marks a significant departure from Max's entrenched materialism, suggesting the possibility of an emerging ecological consciousness. Her yearning for freedom, experimentation, and reconnection with "wildness" ultimately reflects the core insight of deep ecology: that meaningful change requires not only external adjustments but a profound reorientation of human values, identities, and relationships with the natural world.

CONCLUSION

This study examined *Maggie* as a critical representation of anthropocentric consciousness embedded within modern life, demonstrating how such a worldview engenders ecological detachment, ethical limitation, and a persistent privileging of human-centered values. It has further analyzed the extent to which the narrative interrogates these assumptions through moments of resistance, most notably through critiques of consumerism, challenges to social authority, and expressions of personal transformation, while simultaneously revealing the difficulty of moving beyond the very frameworks it critiques. Moreover, the study has shown that these gestures toward change remain largely constrained within human-centered perspectives, thereby highlighting the structural persistence of anthropocentrism within modern subjectivity. Interpreted through deep ecology, the narrative not only exposes the limitations of dominant socio-cultural and economic systems but also underscores the absence of a fully realized ecocentric ethic. This reflects the broader tension between awareness and transformation, where recognition of a crisis does not necessarily translate into ecological reorientation. In the end, this study concludes that *Maggie* foregrounds the necessity of a fundamental reconfiguration of human values, identities, and relational frameworks. It emphasizes that any meaningful response to the ecological crisis must move beyond anthropocentric priorities toward a more integrated, non-hierarchical, and relational understanding of existence that acknowledges the intrinsic value and interconnectedness of all forms of life.



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