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An Ecocritical Study of Paul Zindel's *Let Me Hear You Whisper*

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Abstract

This paper aims at an ecocritical study of Paul Zindel's play, 'Let Me Hear You Whisper'. Though published in 1974 before ecocriticism was founded as a discipline, it unfolds the issue of animal abuse in laboratory testing that causes disruption in the relation of the human/non-human ecosystem. Animal studies have thus emerged with the concern for the environment, rejecting the anthropocentrism that has been reflected in how humans deal with animal testing in laboratories using technology and damaging the natural environment. The cruel handling of experimentation on the non-human world is an abuse of nature and here comes the goal of ecocriticism which attempts to expound how humans are disrupting, not only the natural cosmos, but the whole ecosystem. The analysis will present an introduction to ecocriticism and reveal how this is the main purpose of the play in rejecting animal testing, heading towards raising awareness for environmental ethics.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Anthropocentrism, Biocentrism, Ecosystem, Biosphere, Human, Non-human, Animal, Dolphin, Paul Zindel, *Let Me Hear You Whisper*

Preserving the ecosystem or biosphere as a whole has become a critical issue over the past decades. The issue of nature and environmental abuse has become a serious problem in literary criticism. Works flourished addressing the importance of viewing humans as part of the whole ecosystem, where man is not the proprietor of the earth but abides on it with all other living creatures. Humans cannot consider themselves as masters of the earth but that both human and non-human should be represented as interconnected and not juxtaposed since they share the same landscape that includes all plants and animals as creatures on this earth. According to Scheese (1994),

Landscape by definition includes the non-human elements of place--the rocks, soil, trees, plants, rivers, animals, air--as well as human perceptions and modifications. How an author sees and describes these elements relates to geological, botanical, zoological, meteorological, ecological, as well as aesthetic, social, and psychological, considerations. (p. 11)

Human and non-human should not be opposed to each other; they are all parts of the natural environment and, as such, should be perceived coexisting on planet earth. Consequently, animal studies emerged in relation to ecocriticism for both have a vital concern for animals as essential species of the natural habitat. Besides, discussions on how animals are badly treated by humans whereby anthropocentrism, that has mostly been prevailing western thought in supporting human dominance, has proven to be harmful to the natural environment. In the field of animal studies, anthropocentrism is disclosed in various practices towards animals such as their treatment in laboratories for scientific research. Moreover, the use of modern technology in testing -- while being heedless of animal suffering in the process -- is an ecocritical concern, for its results are damaging to animals that inhabit the same ecosystem. The cruel handling of experimentation on animals in laboratories is an abuse of nature and the natural environment, and here comes the goal of ecocriticism which attempts to expound how humans are disrupting nature and negatively affecting the whole ecosystem. This biocentric view is advocated by ecocritics for it enhances the interdependence of the human and non-human world, which is the main argument of this research. This paper attempts an ecocritical study of *Let Me Hear You Whisper* (1974), a play written by the 1971 drama Pulitzer Prize American winner, Paul Zindel (1936-2003) and which has never been tackled before. An exposition of the rise of ecocriticism and its main proponents will first be illustrated. Then an analysis of the play with regards to animal abuse in testing and the damaging applications of technology in it will be illustrated to reveal that the main purpose of the play as a cry against animal testing is to raise the awareness of environmental consciousness.

Since the publication of William Rueckert's (1996) essay, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism," in 1978 and his coinage of the term ecocriticism (p.103), a number of literature studies centred round ecology as a discipline. Though literature includes previous works about nature and its beauty as with the Romantics and Transcendentalists, yet there has been no tackling of its abuse by humans and the risk arising from that. It was then that theoreticians embarked on

focusing on the hazards of its disruption and over the past few decades, several critics and writers have written about it. As a post-modern approach, ecocriticism lends itself to saving the environment and the landscape with all its habitats for the future harmony of both humanity and the environment to maintain a homogeneous biosphere. It began to take full force in the 1990s when writers got instigated to address the relation between the human and the non-human that abide in the same biosphere, with special reference to the mishandling of the non-human that has resulted in a destructive force on the whole environment. As Oppermann (1999) puts it, "Ecocriticism mainly concentrates on how literature interacts with and participates in the entire ecosphere", adding that it:

attempts to find a common ground between the human and the nonhuman to show how they can coexist in various ways, because the environmental issues have become an integral part of our existence. This is one problem that ecocriticism addresses in its attempt to find a more environmentally conscious position in literary studies. (pp. 29-30)

Within that context, the relation between human and non-human is investigated. Ecocriticism thus relates literature and human beings to the global environment in the hope of raising awareness towards the seriousness of environmental concerns in cultural pre-conceptions and practices that lead to its damage.

The term ecocriticism has its root word illustrated by several ecocritics. William Howarth (1996) in his essay, "Some Principles of Ecocriticism" writes that "Eco and critic both derive from Greek, oikos and kritic, and in tandem they mean 'house judge'" (p. 69). John Loretta (2011) clarifies that "'Eco', from the Greek root '*oikos*', means 'house' . . . Just as 'economy' is the management or law of the house (*nomos* = law), 'ecology' is the study of the house," adding that, "Ecocriticism, then, is the criticism of the 'house,' i.e., the environment, as represented in Literature" (as cited in Fenn, 2015, p. 114). Sandip K. Mishra (2016) also mentions that the word ecology includes "'logy' from 'logos' [or] logical discourse'" and this etymologically encompasses the meaning of "household or earth"; so, combined they mean "criticism of the house – the environment as represented in literature" (p. 168). In that sense, the earth as the natural environment with all its habitats is considered the home of all species and thus coexistence is the key to its preservation. That is why several ecocritics, following the initiative of Cheryll Glotfelty (1996) -- the first ever American Professor of Literature and the Environment at the University of Nevada -- encourage the enhancement of its representation in literature to spread that awareness among its readers.

Several ecocritics provided definitions of ecocriticism in the latest decades. Initially, all ecological perspectives have the shared ground of the American environmentalist, Barry Commoner's (1972) first ecology law that "everything is connected to everything else" (p. 16). Based on that come definitions of the term with ecocritics. William Rueckert (1996) states that his intention is:

to experiment with the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature, because ecology (as a science, as a discipline, as the basis for a human vision) has the greatest relevance to the present and future of the world we all live in of anything that I have studied in recent years. Experimenting a bit with the title of this paper, I could say that I am going to try to discover something about the ecology of literature, or try to develop an ecological poetics by applying ecological concepts to the reading, teaching, and writing about literature. (p. 107)

To him, applying ecology to literature is the key, for it surrounds literature and is relevant to the daily life of humans. His view is that humans are causing great harm to nature and, in so doing, it turns back against them in a counter-reaction due to the destruction of their own environment at their own hands. He is ringing the bell towards that serious issue so humans would realise the fact that they are damaging their own habitat. Humans need to realise that all beings in nature are part and parcel of the environment. Together with nature they are an entity of living beings so, to ecologists, as Morton indicates, nature encircles humans who are therefore in connection with other living animals and plants. Ecology is all about "being-with" (2007, p. 17) the multiplicity of the whole ecosystem as "both the set and the contents of the set. It is the world and the entities in that world" (p.18) and which needs to be regulated by law for the preservation of all species.

To Lawrence Buell (1995), ecocriticism is "a study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in the spirit of commitment to environmentalist's praxis" (p. 430). He expounds that human practices towards the environment reveal how they relate to it and this should be reflected in literature. He recommends some alterations in the reading of literature on the natural environment, affirming that "putting literature under the sign of the natural environment requires some major readjustments in the way serious late twentieth-century readers of literature are taught to read" (p. 144). They should be exposed to such a current issue for the sake of the earth, without which there would be no awareness towards that matter. The environment, then, has to be included in works that would-be eye-openers to their readers on a green culture.

Besides Buell, in her introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in literary Ecology* which she titles "Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis," Glotfelty (1996) defines ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (p. xviii). Seriously concerned with environmental issues while still an undergraduate student even before becoming a professor, her main concern in this essay is human mishandling of the environment. She highlights that the escalating hazards of such ill-treatment are the outcome of human abuse but which literary studies have not heeded before. Glotfelty (1996) unveils that literary studies have had no attention to that issue, that the late twentieth century literature is mainly confined to fashionable topics as racism, gender issues and the like while completely discarding the environment. As a result, the reader of such literature would not know that the environment or that the whole of planet earth is at risk or even "might never know that there was an earth at all" (p. xiv). She regards both human and non-human are inter connected as habitats in the whole ecosystem or biosphere and any imbalance negatively affects it. It is Glotfelty who has

revived the term and advocated its application to literature. She confirms that both human culture and the physical world are interrelated and have a great impact on each other, hence ecocriticism encompasses the "entire ecosphere" (p. xix). Due to that, she remarks that ecocriticism "takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies" (p. xviii). In so doing, literature should work on exposing the dangers resulting from abusing the earth and address those issues before they reach a dead end and the loss of the natural environment.

In their broad definitions of ecocriticism, other critics as Richard Kerridge (1998) and Greg Garrard (2004) share Glotfelty's (1996) view of the term in its relation to literature and human culture. Kerridge (1998) admits that, *ecocritics want to track environmental ideas and representations wherever they appear, to see more clearly a debate which seems to be taking place, often part-concealed, in a great many cultural spaces. Most of all ecocriticism seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis.* (p. 5)

while Garrard (2004) confirms that it is "the study of the relationships of the human and the non-human, throughout human cultural history and entailing critical analysis of the term 'human' itself" (p. 5), adding that ecocriticism is an interdisciplinary genre that depends in its analysis on other disciplines in the humanities including culture, psychology, sociology, philosophy and others (p. 14). However, it is not only confined to those that Garrard (2004) mentions, but one could even add more fields in the natural sciences that are part of it. Apparently, it is rich with environmental studies and ecology as well. Along that approach, Theresa May (2005) remarks that "ecology is everywhere bound up with culture" and, as similar to feminisms, it "addresses injustices felt in the body – the body of experience, of community, of land" (p. 86), considering both human and non-human together in the natural environment. Both can live interdependently as opposite to the anthropocentric view that is mainly human-centred. So, the starting point of ecocriticism is to recognise, respect and treat the non-human world in a manner that maintains coexistence. Again, as Rueckert (1996) confirms, the main concern is to establish the basics upon which the human and natural communities can exist together without damage and thus "flourish in the biosphere" (p. 107). This notion eliminates the anthropocentric view of human dominance of nature and has led to the direction towards animal studies and their abuse by humans. Morton (2007) also notes that animal studies are a critical form of ecocriticism, stating that,

there are more critical forms, such as the advocacy of animal rights, eco feminisms, environmental justice criticism. These are all, in different ways, forms of refusal, the negation of current ways of consuming the world and the advocacy of something else, whether that something else is spelled out or not. (p.115)

Accordingly, tormenting animals in laboratories for the sake of human advancement is not accepted. The field of animal studies began to spread with the concern for animals in the environment, and discussions on how they are treated by humans as part of the ecosystem were on the rise. That harsh treatment is reflected in the anthropocentrism of scientists towards animal testing with the use of modern technological devices, the result of which will lead to the extinction of species and the damage of the natural environment.

Animal abuse is quite evident in Zindel's *Let Me Hear You Whisper*. Its title is taken after a line from a 1910 famous Samoan romantic song called *Let Me Call You Sweetheart*, the refrain of which the playwright actually employs in the play. Published in 1974 even before ecocriticism was founded as a discipline, the play unfolds the issue of animal abuse in laboratory testing. It illustrates how such practice disrupts the relation between human and non-human, leading to a negative ecological impact. The play is in two acts with a cast of five characters; Helen, the cleaning woman who has just been hired to scrub the floors and who is the main protagonist, Dr. Crocus the scientist and Mr. Fridge his assistant, both of whom only appear in the first and last scenes, Miss Moray as Helen's supervisor and, finally, Dan, the night porter. It is set in an animal experimentation laboratory institution where tests are conducted on animals' brains and cognition, with special reference to dolphins in this play. It is an obvious clamour against scientific animal testing that Zindel vociferously proclaims in an attempt to terminate such practices.

The laboratory premise, called the American Biological Association for the Advancement of Brain Analysis, is a huge building where scientists run their tests on different types of animals. There, Dr. Crocus is experimenting with dolphins to make them talk. He attempts to depict how dolphins' brains would react to such tests so that if they can and do talk, they could later be trained for different tasks. One of them is that they could become an asset in warfare plans as Helen discovers later near the end of the play. However, the grave thing is that, if the mammal does not respond before the experimentation deadline is over, it is injected with nicotine mustard to end its life. It then undergoes vivisection and its brain is kept in a jar in the specimen room rather than returning it alive to its habitat. Throughout the course of the play, Helen learns from the night porter that the doctor has tried it several times before with other dolphins but without very significant results, the end of which was the termination of the test and the death of the mammal, whether dying alone or having its life ended via the injection.

Zindel portrays Dr. Crocus as an exponent of the anthropocentric approach, dominating the surrounding environment for the sake of research even if it amounts to ending the life of the creature for the sake of his testing. Mishra (2016) reflects on that by stating that "as earth's only literary being, man considers himself as superior to every other organism" (p. 169). To ecocriticism, that does not give humans the right to dominate other non-human species sharing the same earth. The obsession with brain analysis in the laboratory leads even the Personnel employees to include questions about the applicant's brain response to matters of daily life. This is very weird to Helen who is coming to the laboratory as a floor scrubber, a job she has previously been doing for fourteen years. When asked by Miss Moray how she felt about the Personnel, Helen responds,

They asked a lot of crazy questions . . . They wanted to know what went on in my head when I'm watching television in my living room and the audience laughs. They asked if I ever thought the audience was laughing at me. (Zindel, 1974, I, i, p. 4)

Helen could not grasp why she has been asked that question. Ironically, the question has some bearing on the dolphin experiment as well. Dr. Crocus is concerned about brain analysis. New employees in the place are asked things related to their thoughts, the responses of which might be relevant to his experimentation with dolphins. The link between that question and the experiments conducted on animal testing is an attempt to reach a means of communication between human and non-human in the laboratory where nature faces culture and its technology.

On her first encounter with the dolphin, Helen is bewildered to find a mammal squeezed in a water tank that is hidden by a curtain. She is warned by Miss Morray not to touch it, for the scientist does not allow the employees "to touch either the equipment or the animals." (Zindel, 1974, I, i, p. 7). From the moment she sees it, she feels compassion for it and inquires why it is confined in it. She exclaims, "Do you keep him cramped up in that all the time? . . . He really looks cramped" (Zindel, 1974, I, i, p. 7). Miss Moray's attitude is rigid and she indicates that the doctor has provided a small indoor swimming pool for it to exercise but only at the doctor's discretion. The dolphin is pathetically left there surrounded by the curtain and left in the laboratory till the doctor's return to resume the experimentation. The way Miss Moray speaks about the dolphin reflects her anthropocentrism. Unlike Helen, she does not relate to it but considers "the animals here are used for experimentation" (Zindel, 1974, I, ii, p. 15). To her, the animal is merely a tool towards human scientific advancement as what Dr. Crocus practices. It is an issue of animal ethics here for, according to Oliver (2010),

Animal ethics . . . is not just about animals. It concerns whether or not we can conceive of ethical relationships. . . Can we find a way of relating to others, whether or not they are like us, without excluding them on the basis of what makes them different or unique? (p. 271)

It is a very intricate issue but which reflects the dichotomy in the relationship between human and non-human. The question that Oliver (2010) poses here is whether there is a way to relate. Miss Moray's attitude towards the dolphin is a matter-of-fact thing. She is detached from it and does not consider that it suffers. On the other hand, Helen exhibits tenderness towards it and this presents her at the opposite end of Miss Moray. In her simple spontaneous reaction towards what she recognises as cruelty towards the dolphin, she reverberates a biocentric stand that juxtaposes the anthropocentrism of the laboratory atmosphere. She is the only one presented relating to the mammal and her compassion is felt by it. It actually senses her empathy and this creates a bond between the two of them. Consequently, it only starts uttering some of the song words in Helen's presence but never while any of the other characters is there.

To try to make the dolphin talk, the scientist has a record played several times during the day in the laboratory. That has been going on for several months but without any response from it. The song is frequently played in the hope of the dolphin's catching the words through the continuous repetition of those lines. Dr. Crocus focuses on registering whether its brain could grasp and repeat its words. As mentioned above, one of the lines in the refrain of the song include the title of the play; it says, "Let me call you sweetheart, / I'm in love with you, / Let me hear you whisper / That you love me too" (Zindel, 1974, I, i, p. 8). Zindel employs irony here in the sense that the origin is a romantic song expressing love towards another self, while what is enacted in the laboratory with the dolphin reflects a juxtaposed situation, for the experiment does not reflect any kind of love, but on the contrary, might lead to death. The experiment is based on having a human forcing another being, a non-human to talk and go act against its nature, then killing it when unresponsive to utter words like humans. This abuse is what ecocritics are against. Clark (2011) echoes this anthropocentrism when he emphasizes that "in environmental discourse . . . human beings and their interests are solely of value and always take priority over those of the non-human" (p. 3). To deep ecologists this practice should be prohibited and it is of crucial importance for humans to start altering their comprehension of the environment and behaviour towards nature. Clark(2011) explicates further what deep ecologists reverberate regarding that needed change:

One should see oneself not as an atomistic individual engaged in the world as a resource for consumption and self-assertion, but as part of greater living identity. All human actions should be guided by a sense of what is good for the biosphere as a whole. (p. 2)

Therefore, preserving the biosphere is the target of ecocriticism. Human actions should respect the environment as a whole. No field of scientific research or otherwise should exploit other non-human creatures, in this case it is animals as the goal of this paper, for they are part of the natural environment or the earth. Animals are living creatures abiding with humans and, as such, since they are members of the natural environment, then caring for the non-human is connected to ecocriticism, which also renders it an interdisciplinary approach. Along with what Clark (2011) refers to in the above quotation, he affirms the biocentric view that is evidently embodied in Helen. She is the only character in the play who has empathy towards the dolphin though it takes her some time before it responds. She sings the song while the record is on and, while humming parts of its tune, the dolphin suddenly makes the sound of a lengthy "youuuuuuu" (Zindel, 1974, I, i, p. 9) that corresponds to the refrain. Though the sound bewilders her for some time at first, yet her curiosity leads her to open the curtain hiding the tank to look at the dolphin. She tries to play a child game, "peek-a-boo", with it but gets no reaction. Yet the whole situation is on her mind. Her innate natural instincts make her sympathise with it, especially when she learns that two other dolphins have recently passed through a similar experience before it. Such upsetting situations affirm what ecocritics advocate: the coexistence of human/non-human beings. Human success here is at the expense of other creatures' right to live their own life.

Mishra (2016) denotes that "all organisms have their right to survive in their own way," clarifying that, alongside other beings, "the animals . . . have their role to play to keep up the earth's basic life support system" (p. 169), so killing or leading them to die is a matter of abuse.

Despite her mediocre education and average knowledge, Helen has innate compassion towards animals that is not observed in Miss Moray's rigid attitude. It is an incomprehensible and painful instance for Helen to learn from Dan that dolphins that fail to talk as per the testing, die in the laboratory or get killed. She is mainly disturbed with the idea of getting an animal to talk like a human when it is being treated differently as non-human. When Miss Moray warns her from asking anything about the dolphin, she resorts to question Dan:

Helen: What do they have that thing for?

Dan: What thing?

Helen: That.

Dan: . . . (Pause) they're tryin' to get it to talk.

Helen: Talk?

Dan: Uh-huh, but he doesn't say nothing. (Zindel, 1974, I, i, p. 10)

She gets bewildered at the information and could not understand it since the dolphin is an animal. She feels uncomfortable as Dan explains further that,

They had one last year that used to laugh. It'd go "heh heh heh heh heh heh heh." Then they got another one that used to say, "Yeah, it's four o'clock." Everybody took pictures of that one. All the magazines and newspapers. (Zindel, 1974, I, i, p.11)

It is even more alarming for her when he elaborates what happened to that dolphin which they took pictures of; it kept saying that phrase, "Yeah, it's four o'clock. . . until it died of pneumonia" (Zindel, 1974, I, i, p.11). The news terrifies her to the extent that she cannot have any more of what he is saying. Learning that the previous dolphin died because it is only through their blowholes that dolphins can utter sounds, so trying to talk affects their respiration, her reaction to Dan's offer to show her the dolphin's blowhole is a clear cut "No . . . I don't want to look at any blowhole" (Zindel, 1974, I, i, p.11). It is that cruelty towards the animal that is disturbing. The fact that an animal is abused for research is damaging to the environment according to ecocritics. It is an ethical issue because animals involved in experimentation do experience pain and suffering in the process. The media coverage of the dolphin experiment in the play come for news of the success of an experiment at the expense of other creatures. That situation is not accepted by Helen and, again, it echoes biocentrism which, according to Clark (2011),

Would affirm the intrinsic value of all-natural life and displace the current preference of even the most trivial human demands over the needs of other species or integrity of place. (p. 2)

The issue here is the cruel testing on defenseless creatures that cannot stand up for their rights. Unfortunately, though they share the same landscape, they are facing testing by humans without being able to oppose it because they are totally defenseless. It is an exploitation of animals without considering any rights for their life as well as its being a hazardous impact on the environment, thus breaches any rights for animals. According to Dunnuck (2016), however beneficial animal testing in research is for humans, there is always the concern that "the pain, the suffering, and the deaths of animals are not worth the possible human benefits" (par. 1).

The jars in the specimen room that Miss Moray assigns her to clean as part of her responsibility constitute another emotional distress for Helen. The room is described as "packed with specimen jars of all sizes. Various animals and parts of animals are visible in their formaldehyde baths" (Zindel, 1974, I, i, p. 13); she is stunned by the sight. It is ironical that, at the same moment, while the record in the laboratory is heard with the refrain, "Let me call you sweetheart" (Zindel, 1974, I, i, p. 13), Helen is confronted with the deadly specimens that she "gasps" at the sight. One specific jar catches her eyes for containing a "preserved human brain" floating inside (Zindel, 1974, I, i, p. 13). The contrast is shocking to her. Zindel portrays it in a manner that reflects the horror of the situation, all expressed in one word that describes her reaction which is gasping. Her natural feelings are projected in that sound she makes, reflecting difficulty in breathing at that sight.

Again, in the following scene, Helen is given another indirect warning against getting too emotional about the dolphin by referring to the status of the previous cleaner who was there before her. What she unfolds allows her to learn more about animal abuse in experimentation. The previous cleaner has had some sort of link with Dr. Crocus' testing mice and that emotionally tortured her due to the distorting effect of modern equipment used on them. With a few pauses, Miss Moray comments:

Well, take Marguerita. She had fallen in love with the mice. All three hundred of them. She seemed shocked when she found out Dr. Crocus was...using...them at the rate of twenty or so a day in connection with electrode implanting. She noticed them missing after a while and when I told her they'd been decapitated, she seemed terribly upset. (Zindel, 1974, I, ii, pp. 15-16)

Helen cannot accept what is said. Her mind immediately thinks of the dolphin and her reaction is just one serious query: "What do they want with the fish-mammal? . . . I can't understand you" (Zindel, 1974, I, ii, p.16). Her simple understanding is unable to comprehend why such violent action is taken against helpless creatures. She cannot figure out why they are sacrificed for the sake of scientific success. At Miss Moray's heightened and fantasised comment that if humans and dolphins can "communicate! Wouldn't it be wonderful?", she very cynically remarks, "Oh, yeah . . . They chopped the heads off three hundred mice? That's horrible" (Zindel, 1974, I, ii, p. 16). The thought of committing such an act of killing creatures is, therefore,

unethical. More is to astound her with the fact that a huge number of mice-- as innocent creatures-- are decapitated for the sake of science in such laboratories, the minimum of which are five thousand laboratories around the country. In her bewilderment, she innocently tries to calculate the number, "five thousand times three hundred...that's a lot of mouse heads. Can't you just have one lab chop off a couple and then spread the word?" (Zindel, 1974, I, ii, p. 17). This makes her more attached to the helpless creature in the tank. As Miss Moray notices it, she warns Helen to detach herself for, without doing so, having her in the laboratory would not be an asset. She then reiterates it more firmly while Zindel uses ellipses to denote stopping for seconds to find the appropriate words for the message she wishes to deliver:

Now, Helen – this is exactly what I mean. You will do best not to become fond of the subject animals. When you're here a little longer you'll learn ... well ... there are some things you just have to accept by faith. (Zindel, 1974, I, ii, p. 17)

The anguish Helen passes through is severe. She herself becomes stressed, not knowing what to do and how to react. The dolphin as a non-human creature does not deserve to be killed for its inability to do something against its own nature. The exploitation of animals for what her supervisor sees is of great advantage to humans is unjustified; besides, the negative and deadly consequences resulting from such experimentation can never be worth the suffering. That rejection is best illustrated in Dunnuck's (2016) words:

Animals' rights are violated when they are used in research because they are not given a choice. Animals are subjected to tests that are often painful or cause permanent damage or death, and they are never given the option of not participating in the experiment. (para. 2)

On the other hand, Miss Moray represents the opposite stance. She rigidly considers animal testing as a matter of fact for the advancement of humans. Fearing Helen might get involved with what happens to the dolphin or obtain any information from Dan, she describes him as "an idle-chatter breeder" (Zindel, 1974, I, i, p. 12) who has previously been cautioned that "this is a scientific atmosphere you're employed in and we would appreciate a minimum of subjective communication" (Zindel, 1974, I, i, p. 13), preventing any conversation between the two. Obviously, as Dan has been working at the laboratory institution for some time, so he is aware of the procedures that occur, but he is warned that he has only got to do his job. That is why when both workers are in the laboratory with the dolphin and Dan is about to show Helen its blowhole, they are surprised to find Miss Moray coming in unnoticed. She has been watching them at the tank on coming in and immediately calls Helen questioningly. Her notion of testing does not take the natural environment into account. She tells Helen, "dolphins may have an intelligence equal to our own. And if we can teach them our language -- or learn theirs -- we'll be able to communicate" (Zindel, 1974, I, ii, p. 16). To forcefully have non-humans perform what humans only can do is a violation of the biosphere. But Miss Moray does not see any harm in what Dr. Crocus is doing in his experimentation, whether it hurts the creature or not, or if the animal suffers during the process of testing or even dies; as long as it is something that might be good for man, then sacrificing other creatures is for a higher cause. The human is in the centre of nature, and anything else could be sacrificed. In this sense, the situation is an opposition between culture and nature since "the non-human world . . . [is] considered as an object of human exploitation" (Clark, 2011, p. 7). She cannot go beyond the conception of the human-centred approach to nature and the environment. The dolphin is just a "mammal" (Zindel, 1974, I, i, p. 9), a species to be experimented on so that whatever is around in nature would be for the progress of man and, therefore, should be exploited for human not non-human progress. Dunnuck (2016) declines this for animals "feel, think, behave, and experience pain" (para. 2), adding that in testing laboratories they:

Live stressful, monotonous, and unnatural lives of daily confinement and deprivation. The only changes in their lives may come from being called into a research or testing protocol -- which may include an invasive experiment, or a procedure whose endpoint is death. (Bentham, n.d., para. 1)

This is what Miss Moray and her anthropocentrism ignore. Eventually, she is apathetic towards the dolphin's life that is to be terminated, the mice that were decapitated or the St. Bernard dog they killed after the testing.

Despite her warnings and due to what she personally experiences in the laboratory, Helen insists on connecting with the dolphin. Heedless of Miss Moray's notifications to stay aloof, she goes against her instructions and opens the curtain hiding the tank so she can view the dolphin while scrubbing the floor. She tries to imitate the same sound it made earlier as mentioned before but cannot get any response. But the moment she approaches it and observes how sad it looks, she tenderly touches its head and it immediately wriggles with delight. From that moment, an actual bond between both, the human and non-human, is strengthened. The dolphin utters the word "whisper" that the record has been playing throughout, ending the second scene of the play.

Sensing Helen's compassion, the dolphin only responds to her and Zindel makes it produce the sound of words from the refrain repeating them after her. Helen's attachment to the animal makes her decide to free it from its current status as a creature that needs help, regardless of its being non-human. She notices how it stirs uncomfortably when formaldehyde is to be brought and, when she enquires about it, Miss Moray informs her of the decision to end the experiment process with it through ending its life. Again, with Zinder's use of ellipses as previously mentioned, she disseminates that information with breaks in speech:

Helen: What's formaldehyde for?

Miss Moray: The experiment series on...the dolphin...will...terminate on Friday. That's why it has concerned me that you've apparently grown...fond...of the mammal.

Helen: they're gonna kill it? . . . What for? Because it didn't say anything? Is that what they're killing it for?(Zindel, 1974, I, iii, p. 20)

As in several instances of the play, Helen's biocentrism encounters Miss Moray's anthropocentrism. Helen's horror is exemplified and reflects the pain and suffering she is passing through for that awaited dreadful action. The climax of her supervisor's belief is mainly to endorse human genius above all. Miss Moray ascertains:

Helen, no matter how lovely our intentions, no matter how lonely we are and how much we want people or animals . . . to like us... we have no right to endanger the genius about us.(Zindel, 1974, I, iii, p. 20)

The animal means nothing to her as long as it is the human genius that counts. Helen's eyes are sadly opened to the fact that technology is being used to destroy nature. They will be using vivisection on the dolphin, the apparatus of which is Dan's responsibility to sharpen, "gonna sharpen the handsaws now. Won't have any trouble getting through the skull on this one" (Zindel, 1974, I, iii, p. 20), at which Helen collapses. Zindel gives a vivid description of her state in the stage directions. She "looks at the dolphin, which is staring desperately at her" and calling, "Help . . . Please help me" to the extent that she "is so moved by the cries of the dolphin, she looks ready to burst into tears" (Zindel, 1974, I, iii, pp. 20-21). Helen is unable to bear what Dunnuck (2016) concludes, that animals suffer "ongoing mental and physical suffering from the endless boredom, confinement, fear, and emotional stress of daily laboratory life" (para. 7). She is tortured and for her, as Regan (1985) postulates, in animal experimentations,

Their pain, their suffering, their loneliness, their innocence, their death. Anger. Rage. Pity. Sorrow. Disgust. The whole creation groans under the weight of the evil we humans visit upon these mute, powerless creatures. (p26)

Because of such conviction, her supervisor decisively prevents her from witnessing the process of killing the dolphin, making it seem as if Helen's watching is the issue and not the latter's main environmental concern. That lengthy conversation is vital in observing how the simple-minded and compassionate cleaner is taking a stand to defend the dolphin. In an attempt to defer the killing, she asks Miss Moray:

Helen: When they gonna kill it?

Miss Moray: Don't say kill, Helen. You make it sound like murder. Besides, you won't have to go into the laboratory at all this evening.

Helen: How do they kill it?

Miss Moray: Nicotine mustard, Helen. It's very humane. They inject it.

Helen: Maybe he's a mute . . . Some human beings are mute, you know. Just because they can't talk we don't kill them . . . Maybe he can type with his nose. Did you try that?(Zindel, 1974, II, pp. 22-23)

Once more, Zindel here is very ironical in making Miss Moray state that the killing is humane. The contrast unravels how humans cause the destruction of the environment that conceives all creatures. With humans having this conception, nothing beautiful would be left on this earth according to ecocritics. If humans believe it is humane to kill other creatures, then where does the human actually stand? It is a definite breach in the relation between human and non-human. While Miss Moray proves to be merely a person without any consideration for nature, a rigid personality not caring for members of the natural environment, Helen's character endorses nature. They all belong to the same ecosystem so it is their right to coexist without being at the hazard of such treatment. She believes the dolphin has its own right to live without any human interference to terminate its life for any reason, let alone a human characteristic that is not for it to perform. It is that sense of oneness with nature that she perceives. Her obsession with the prospected process makes her ask all possible questions about when and how that dreadful action would occur and insists on getting answers to her queries. In an attempt to dissuade Miss Moray, she argues against killing the animal. Consequently, she desperately strives to free it from what awaits it. Losing hope, however, she darts to the laboratory without her supervisor's noticing, helplessly rushes to the dolphin's tank and endeavours to make it talk and thus spare its life; otherwise, she herself would inform them it can talk. The dolphin does communicate with her, mimicking the words, "Help . . . Help me" (Zindel, 1974, II, p. 24).

In his cry against scientific animal abuse as clarified in the above discussion, Zindel chooses the dolphin and makes it speak as one of the closer primate species to human cognition in mammals. Scientists have revealed that dolphins possess a degree of intelligence that somehow links them to humans. Andrew (1962) argues that,

The most striking difference from other mammals appears to be the degree to which dolphin vocalization can be modified; dolphins can be trained to vocalize for a reward, and there is evidence of some degree of mimicking. (p. 585)

Likewise, Roth and Dicke (2005) in their article, "Evolution of the brain and intelligence", demonstrate that,

The most-cited example for a unique human ability is syntactical-grammatical language. Most authors agree that sentences consisting of up to three words can be understood and used by chimpanzees, gorillas and dolphins.(p. 255)

As for Herman (2010), he confirms that over a period of thirty-four years of studies on dolphins in Honolulu, the outcome of the research is that,

Dolphins understood novel instructions conveyed within artificial gestural or acoustic language systems using "sentences" as long as five words whose interpretation required processing of both the semantic and syntactic features of the languages . . . Both vocal mimicry of novel sounds and behavioral . . . mimicry of other dolphins and of humans was demonstrated (p. 310)

Dolphins then have the intelligence to understand words within the range of sounds or structural features of a language. They can even understand what their trainers convey and mimic them (Herman, 2010, p. 310). Herzing (2014) asserts that dolphins

have a brain proportion that allows them to comprehend some language structures and meaning. They are thus capable of cognition. In her "Profiling nonhuman intelligence: An exercise in developing unbiased tools for describing other 'types' of intelligence on earth", she writes that,

Laboratory studies of intra and inter- species referential communication and competence have revealed both semantic and syntactic understanding in . . . chimpanzees and bottlenose dolphins. Dolphins . . . have the second largest encephalization quotient and complex cognitive abilities and have a variety of mechanisms of information transfer and teaching mechanisms. (p. 677)

She further elaborates that it is thought that dolphins have "high complex communication, associations, and big brains" (p. 677) that associate them with some kind of intelligence that discloses cognitive competence. Therefore, on the basis of such research, dolphins can and do mimic human vocalising. It is no strange thing then that Zindel makes it talk words mimicked from the song and communicate with Helen.

The communication between Helen and the dolphin now takes another step. Wondering why Dr. Crocus wants it to talk, the reason she is informed of is unjustifiable. To transform and modernise the fishing industry, as Miss Moray affirms, is not a cause to torture the non-human for the welfare of the human. Her terrified reaction, "Is that all? . . . It'd be good if they talked?" (Zindel, 1974, II, p. 28) is a scream against animal testing that will eventually damage the ecosystem. No reason is convincing enough to her, not even the examples Miss Moray lists for advancement:

They'd be a blessing to the human race. A blessing. They would be worshipped in oceanography. Checking the Gulf Stream ... taking water temperatures, depths, salinity readings. To say nothing of the contributions they could make in marine biology, navigation, linguistics! (Zindel, 1974, II, p. 28)

All of those excuses mean nothing to Helen as opposed to the suffering and torture of the dolphin. It is obvious that Miss Moray either has no idea or does not care about the actual reason behind Dr. Crocus' experiment which Helen discovers later. Alarmed at the situation and desiring to reach a solution, the dolphin tells Helen, "Hear" and "Hear me" (Zindel, 1974, I, iii, pp. 19-20) several times while she tries to figure out what it is referring to. When she desperately shouts at it, "They're gonna kill you!", it keeps repeating the words "Plaaaaaaan" (Zindel, 1974, II, p. 25) and "Boooooooooook" (Zindel, 1974, II, p. 29). It confuses her to the extent that she almost loses hope in fetching any book. When Dan comes to her assistance and brings her the doctor's experiment folder she has requested, she skims through it but discerns that the issue is not just as Miss Moray has mentioned earlier. Zindel describes the contents of the folder in the stage directions as "a bulky affair" (1974, II, p. 26). While rummaging through it, she reads bits and pieces with breaks in speech between them while moving from one thing to the other. Zindel indicates her perplexity and tension in using ellipses to imply the horror of the situation and the disastrous use of technology they want to perform via the dolphin. She reads loudly while addressing the dolphin:

Military implications ... war ... plant mines in enemy waters ... deliver atomic warheads ... war ... nuclear torpedoes ... attach bombs to submarines ... terrorize enemy waters ... war ... They're already thinking about ways to use you for war. Is that why you can't talk to them?

(pause) What did you talk to me for?

(pause) You won't talk to them, but you ... talk to me because ... you want something ... there's something ... I can do? (Zindel, 1974, II, p. 31)

The manner in which the ellipses are set, thirteen times in the above lines from the play, exemplify her fright with fast reading while gasping for breath in scare at the vicious intentions for using the animal. Humans intend to use non-humans for the satisfaction of their malicious and environmentally destructive targets: underwater military plants and pitheads for wars that kill and destroy not only humans, but the whole landscape, biosphere or ecosphere gets negatively affected. It designates the damaging rather than the beneficial and constructive consequences of technological advances which Zindel stridently declaiming.

That discovery moment of the experimentation hidden cause is the climax for Helen to take action. "Confused and scared" as Zindel (1974, II, p. 32) describes her, she attempts to compile a word from the split syllables the dolphin says as "Hamm" and "purr" (Zindel, 1974, II, p. 31), at the same instant that Dan appears, pushing "a dissection table loaded with shiny instruments" (Zindel, 1974, II, p. 32) and accompanied by Miss Moray and Mr. Fridge. They are heading towards the laboratory for Dr. Crocus to terminate the dolphin's life. The link established between her and the dolphin makes them able to communicate without the latter being scared of her. Her concern and anguish to act is projected on the animal itself. Their communication goes as follows:

Helen: You want me to do something with the hamper. What? To get it? To put you ...you want me to put you in it? But what'll I do with you? Where can I take you?

Dolphin: Sea.

Helen: See? See what?

Dolphin: Sea.

Helen: I don't know what you're talking about. They'll be back in a minute. I don't know what to do!

Dolphin: Sea ... sea ...

Helen: See?... The sea! That's what you're talking about! The river ... to the sea!(Zindler, 1974, II, p. 33)

When she finally realises the connection of the laundry 'hamper' after checking with Dan, then comprehends the reference to the sea, she rushes to fetch the hamper from the hall and darts back into the laboratory to get the dolphin out. However, her

plan fails at the entry of Miss Moray, finding her behind the curtain surrounding the tank “with her arms around the front part of the dolphin, lifting it a good part of the way out of the water” (Zindel, 1974, II, p. 34), believing Helen is hugging the mammal, at which Helen drops it back in the water. At that instant, the immediate entry of the scientific team, the sight of the dissection table with the tools, the filling of the hypodermic syringe with nicotine mustard, the vivisection to get through the skull, the encephalogram and the electrodes Mr. Fridge starts implanting in the dolphin's head as well as the dolphin's suffering as it starts to make “high-pitched distress signals” (Zindel, 1974, II, p. 35), fill Helen with agony and misery that she bursts in tears while Miss Moray fires her saying:

You really are a nice person, Helen. A very nice person. But to be simple and nice in a world where great minds are giant-stepping the micro – and macrocosms, well – one would expect you'd have the humility to yield in unquestioning awe. (Zindel, 1974, II, p. 35)

Helen is not welcomed in the laboratory any more for opposing scientific animal testing and being compassionate to another being in the ecosystem. The dichotomy between her position and that of Miss Moray offers her no place there. Her problem with her supervisor and the laboratory is her biocentrism as contradictory to their anthropocentrism. Her mistake, according to the standards of the place, is feeling empathy for the animal being under experimentation, caring for it as a natural creature that shares the same right to live as created. It does not have to succumb to cruel human experiments as a member of non-human species.

About to leave the laboratory with a broken heart, Helen suddenly returns empowered with her biocentric belief. While the record commences the refrain of the song, she heads back directly towards the laboratory and backfires against the anthropocentric team. She firmly decides to stand against the cruelty, the violence and injustice of humans against non-humans, taking a positive stand regardless of anything for the sake of the dolphin, that helpless and defenseless being. Her words formulate a severe outcry against scientific animal testing, and she offers an example of standing firm for one's beliefs for the development, not the destruction, of the environment:

Who do you think you are? (pause) Who do you think you “are”? (pause) I think you're a pack of killers, that's what I think ... I'm very tired of being a nice person ... I'm going to report you to the ASPCA, or somebody, because ... I've decided I don't like you cutting the heads off mice and sawing through the skulls of St. Bernards ... and if being a nice person is just not saying anything and letting you pack of butchers run around doing whatever you want, then I don't want to be nice anymore. (pause) You gotta be very stupid people to need an animal to talk before you know just from looking at it that it's saying something ... that it knows what pain feels like. I'd like to see you all with a few electrodes in your head. Being nice isn't very good. (Zindel, 1974, II, pp.36-37)

As a proponent of nature, she confronts the culture that destroys it represented in Dr. Crocus, Mr. Fridge and Miss Moray. She finally disseminates her ecological message and voices her honest thoughts and feelings that endorse the natural environment, relating between its humans and non-humans. As such, she proves she is much more ecologically aware than them. Yet, at the peak of that confrontation she faces the dolphin and outbursts,

They just kill you off if you do that. And that's being a coward. You gotta talk back. You gotta speak up against what's wrong and bad, or you can't ever stop it. At least you've gotta try. . . You're a coward, that's what you are. I'm going. (Zindel, 1974, II, p. 39)

In response to her attitude, the dolphin talks for the first time in the presence of Dr. Crocus and his team, saying “Looooooooooooooooooooo” (Zindel, 1974, II, p. 38) to Helen who pats it for encouragement before leaving the place for the last time. It is noticeable that her words did not affect any of them. Dr. Crocus, concerned only about the success of his experiment, just wants to have the tape on to record what the dolphin has just said. However, he suddenly realises that there is a relation between Helen and the dolphin's talk and orders Miss Moray to bring her back. But Helen is ready to lose her job rather than have nature destroyed. Love and compassion connect her with the dolphin. It is empathy that brings both together, the human and non-human in the oneness of the natural ecosystem, but which the doctor and his team are destroying. As Manna (1984) holds, while “attempting to save the dolphin's life, she confronts an intense scientific establishment” (p. 716), voicing Zindel's outcry to raise awareness against animal testing and call for the urgent need of environmental ethics.

This paper has attempted a study of Zindel's play, *Let Me Hear You Whisper*, from an ecocritical approach. As a term, ecocriticism has flourished over the past few decades with the concern for the environment and a lot of literary criticism has developed its focus towards this issue. The preservation of the natural environment has become a grave problem as humans are mistreating and abusing the non-human world and, in this paper, the focus has been on animal abuse in scientific testing laboratories. Ecocriticism advocates the coexistence of both the human and non-human worlds. It favours biocentrism as opposed to the anthropocentrism that has been dominant in western thought with regards to human/non-human relations in the natural environment, landscape, ecosphere or biosphere, all used interchangeably to refer to that entity. Anthropocentrism supports the view of a human-centred universe and all other creatures could be used for human welfare, whereas biocentrism strongly advocates the coexistence of both human and non-human interdependently in the same ecosphere. Ecocriticism endorses the whole ecosystem as an entity that encompasses all creatures in it, whether humans, animals, plants or others. As such, animal studies have emerged, addressing the maltreatment of humans towards the animal species and, most specifically, using technology in scientific experimentation, which causes pain and suffering to creatures unable to defend themselves. Ecocriticism is thus considered interdisciplinary due to its relation to other scientific fields. Several ecocritics have given definitions of the term since the publication of Rueckert's essay on the topic in 1996. They share the common view that there

should be a relation between ecology and literature whereby the hazardous implications of the relation between the human and non-human are exposed and addressed. Literature should give more attention to problems related to the natural environment to raise human awareness towards the damaging effect that man inflicts on it, with the aim of preserving the ecosystem.

Despite the fact that *Let Me Hear You Whisper* was published before ecocriticism was established as a discipline, yet the play is rich with environmental concerns and is an obvious outcry against scientific animal testing. Zindel stands steadfast against it for it causes the destruction of the natural environment. He mainly focuses on the grave issue of laboratory experimentation on animals, basically dolphins in the play, which exposes the anthropocentrism of human/non-human relation. Non-human species should be treated with respect as members of the ecosystem. Zindel's zeal towards the preservation of the natural environment as embodied in Helen is a firm NO to animal testing. *Let Me Hear You Whisper* thus demonstrates biocentrism in the hope of raising awareness towards the preservation of the biosphere with the interdependent relation between all human and non-human creatures inhabiting it.

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