

# Case Study on The Revenant from the Perspective of Ecoliterature Criticism

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## Abstract

The Revenant is a work relevant to ecological system and environment. When the work proceeds its story forward, we can see so many things happening at one time between man and nature, especially the fight between Hugh Glass and the grizzly bear. Therefore, this paper tries to explain some phenomenon from the angle of ecoliterature criticism in order to promote the importance of harmony between mankind and nature.

## Keywords

The Revenant, ecoliterature, criticism.

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## 1. Introduction

Ecoliterature aims to arouse the awareness of mankind's conscience of protecting the natural environment we are living in. *The Revenant* is a story of advocating for such cause with a good reason. In this story, it has several scenes that are very typical of the relationship between man and nature. Therefore, this papers aims to analyze the cases with the help of each principle of the ecoliterature criticism.

## 2. Case Study on Hugh Glass' s Fight Against the Grizzly from the Perspective of Ecological Integration

The ecological integration mainly focuses on discussing the harmony, stability, balance and sustainability between man nature. From these four aspects, *The Revenant* reveals them in different scenes of man interacting with nature. Therefore, Hugh Glass has the fighting scene with a grizzly bear which is very typical example to show the fight between man and nature.

### 2.1 Analysis on the Fight from the Perspective of Harmony and Balance

Harmony means to reach the best coping state of man and nature, in which man learns to admire and protect the ecological system of nature and in return man will get what nature has been giving and makes it recycle in favor of both good development. However, such ideal harmony is still being promoted and advocated till it's completely fulfilled. In Hugh Glass' s example, he fights against the grizzly which totally reflects the current conflict between man and nature and the urgent need to rebuild harmony and balance with nature.

#### Example 1

*The flint sparked the Anstadt's pan, setting off the rifle and filling the air with the smoke and smell of exploding black powder. The grizzly roared as the ball entered her chest, but her attack did not slow. Glass dropped his rifle, useless now, and reached for the knife in the scabbard on his belt.*

In this example, Hugh uses the modern the modern weapon to fight the grizzly, which reflects the human civilization has a bad impact upon nature. Human invents the firing powder and weapon not

just for wars but also for hunting animals. This is an ethic crime that human should take to themselves. The writer vividly describes how the bullet went into the grizzly's chest and what reaction the grizzly would give out after being shot. Such process responds us with the fact that human can be very aggressive towards nature and being so aggressive means no harmony can be reached so far. In this case, when the grizzly is shot by Hugh, it does not capitulate to any hurt and harm Hugh is bestowing upon it but continues to fight for its life. That leads to Hugh having to prepare another fight-back with his knife. Such scene is clearly reflecting the fight between man and nature. Man try to show off how powerful they are before nature with the pride of using the weapon invented. On the other hand, nature does not get scared of the powerful lethal weapon but fight back with the original and natural way, which used to be the way of mankind fighting against other beasts in the wild before civilization has come. This is no harmony but conflict. And such fighting scene reveals to us the urgent need for harmony between man and nature.

#### Example 2

*The grizzly dropped to all fours and was on him. Glass rolled into a ball, desperate to protect his face and chest. She bit into the back of his neck and lifted him off the ground, shaking him so hard that Glass wondered if his spine might snap.*

In this example, it clearly reflects the hard fight back by nature. Mankind has to pay a price if continuing to destroy nature and kill its creature instead of loving them. No matter how powerfully equipped mankind will be, there's no way for mankind to fight over nature with bare hands. The reason the grizzly attacked Hugh Glass is because Hugh Glass is the one who initiates the fight. That reflects the fact that nature has its way to protect itself from being harmed and mankind should stop such brutal way of treating nature while such way will bring back the side effect to mankind themselves, which is symbolized by the description of Hugh wondering if his spine being snapped. Neither man and nature are at a balanced and harmonious situation, nor are the strength between them. Obviously, writer describes the grizzly having so much strength and fight back even after being shot in the chest. Such reveals the extreme strength comparison between the grizzly and Hugh which refers to the nature and mankind.

#### Example 3

*He screamed in agony. She dropped him, then sank her teeth deep into his thigh and shook him again, lifting him and throwing him to the ground with such force that he lay stunned—conscious, but unable to resist any further.*

In this example, mankind ultimately loses to nature. Hugh cannot beat down the grizzly. Instead, the grizzly has a very harmful attack upon him making him unable to fight back. Such description reveals the fact that mankind would receive the punishment by nature if they don't start to rebuild the harmony and balance with nature. As it describes Hugh's pains, such pains are symbol for the punishment that would be bestowed upon mankind after harming nature mercilessly. On the other hand, Hugh still remains conscious even after being ferociously attacked, which reveals mankind's great tenacity and determination to survive under grave situation.

## 2.2 Analysis on the Fight from the Perspective of Stability and Sustainability

Ecoliterature criticism lays stress on the stable and sustainable development of the relation between nature and mankind. Such stability is demonstrated in the ecological system and sustainability in the method of developing.

#### Example 4

*The growl crescendoed as she stepped into the clearing, black eyes staring at Glass, head low to the ground as she processed the foreign scent, a scent now mingling with that of her cubs.*

In this example, it gives us the information about the creature that Hugh is hunting that it is a grizzly and it has its cubs. That symbolizes the ecological system of recycling that mother bear gives birth to baby bears so as to continue its bloodline and generation. However, Hugh Glass now targets the

mother grizzly which means the baby grizzlies would have no mother after Hugh takes her down. That would threaten the life circle of nature and hold him to ethic responsibility.

According to Zhang Jianguo's argument in 2005, mankind should hold ecological justice towards creatures and nature and life's respect. On the other hand, Hugh does not hold justice to this mother grizzly or show her the respect she deserves. Hugh notices she has cubs and still tries to shoot her for her fur, which is totally inhumane and cruel to modern civilization. Such hunting will threaten the ecological stability of creatures' proliferation so that the creatures will not sustain their own species by generating their lines. This example demonstrates the ethic guilt to Hugh who does not realize it yet. Such ethic guilt is determined by the man in his own situation himself whether he would choose to kill or not kill the creature.

#### Example 5

*An enormous grizzly lay sprawled on her belly, eyes open but dead. One cub stood on hind legs, pressing against the sow with its nose, futilely seeking to evoke some sign of life. The other cub rooted at something, tugging with its teeth. Harris realized suddenly it was a man's arm. Glass. He raised his rifle and shot the nearer of the two cubs.*

In this example, trapper Black Harris should be held to ethic accountability for shooting the two baby cubs who just lost their mother. This depicts a very sad scene of a little cub trying to wake its mother up and the other feeling very scared and unsafe. They are symbolized as the fragility of nature which mankind has been always breaking and hurting. Such example reflects the humanity in Black Harris and the humanity of mankind before nature. To hurt unprotected young animals is to show out the cruelty of someone hidden inside. There's indeed no need to kill the baby cubs and they still did in the end. Such scene is very warning and very touching to see how the baby cubs got killed right after the mother grizzly being shot. Such doing interrupts the sustainable development of the grizzly species. Killing their posterity means ending the continuity of such species in the future.

### 3. Case Study on Eleven-Trappers Troop from the Perspective of Ecological Relations and Cultural Criticism

Eleven-trappers troop is a typical example to study human behavior in the natural environment and the influence of nature on them. For these eleven trappers, they have been on a journey to hunt for furs, which means they have to live in the natural environment and that relates to the discuss over mankind's behavior of living in the wild and examines the eco-aesthetic.

#### 3.1 Analysis on Andrew Henry from the Perspective of the Influence of Nature on Man

The influence of nature on man mainly focuses on discussing the material and the mental influence. The material influence, of course, includes the natural environment and the mental influence mainly comes from mankind's being engaged in nature without fulfilling his own desire.

#### Example 6

*Cold'll set in hard by early December," continued the captain. "We'll need two weeks to lay in a supply of meat. If we're not on the Yellowstone before October we'll have no fall hunt.*

In this example, the material influence includes the cold weather and meat. Such material influence will affect Captain Henry's feeling about the hunt, which is related to the livelihood of his troop members.

#### Example 7

*If Captain Henry was racked by internal doubt, his commanding physical presence betrayed no infirmity. The band of leather fringe on his deerskin tunic cut a swath across his broad shoulders and chest, remnants of his former profession as a lead miner in the Saint Genevieve district of Missouri. He was narrow at the waist, where a thick leather belt held a brace of pistols and a large knife. His breeches were doeskin to the knee, and from there down red wool.*

In this example, it relates to example two. Captain Henry is occupied by the hunting, which causes doubt inside of him. Such causing is the mental influence the natural environment has bestowed upon

him. Apart from the mental influence, this example has clearly described the outlook of Captain Henry, which from the side of view reflects the fact that mankind kills wild animals in favor of his own interest. According to the above example, here are the wild-animal-made clothing of Captain Henry: leather, deerskin tunic, doeskin breeches and red wool. All these clothing are made of wild animals' furs. Apart from it, Captain Henry used to be lead miner, which means back in the nineteenth century in the U.S., people already started to destroy natural environment by exploiting those natural resources mercilessly. Such description tells us the truth about how mankind try to damage the balance of ecological system and hunt down these wild animals mercilessly out of profitable purpose. No matter what it is, example two reveals the fact that mankind don't protect nature and let the environment continue to escalate, and nature will punish mankind by many other extreme weathers. Captain Henry is symbolized as mankind as a whole and the cold is symbolized as the natural disaster mankind will face. Example three is typical of being preview over what grave situation mankind will face while destroying natural environment. Both examples present that mankind's status in nature is at the position of master and conqueror of nature, instead of being an equivalence.

### 3.2 Analysis on William Anderson and Fitzgerald from the Perspective of Sociocultural Factors on Man's Behavior of Living in Natural Environment

Social and cultural factors play an important role in affecting people's behavior while living in the natural environment without too much convenience of man-made technology. In particular, people may cause conflicts against each other out of some ethic reason. The eleven trappers are symbolized as a society in nature, in which each individual comes from different places of the United States, which reveals the symbol of different local culture.

#### Example 8

*The men fell into clusters of three or four, huddled against the bank or pressed against a rock or clump of sage, as if these minor protusions might offer protection.*

#### Example 9

*"Do you think he suffered, Hugh? I can't get it out of my head that he was suffering away, all that time."*

*"I don't think your brother suffered."*

*"He was the oldest. When we left Kentucky, our folks told him to look after me. Didn't say a word to me. Wouldn't have occurred to them."*

*"You did your best for your brother, Will. It's a hard truth, but he was dead when that ball hit him three days ago."*

#### Example 10

*Fitzgerald brought his leg up sharply as he rose to meet the attack, his shin catching Anderson full-force in the groin. The kick folded Anderson in two, as if some hidden cord drew his neck to his knees. Fitzgerald drove his knee into the helpless man's face and Anderson flipped backward. Fitzgerald moved spryly for someone his size, pouncing to pin his knee against the chest of the gasping, bleeding man. He put the skinning knife to Anderson's throat. "You want to go join your brother?" Fitzgerald pressed the knife so that the blade drew a thin line of blood.*

Regarding example four, it explicitly describes the then natural environment these eleven trappers are living in, which is cold and hard. These men need to use their nearby rocks as protection which reflects humans learn to survive in the wild when there's no man-made instrument for protection at all.

Regarding example five, this is a conversation between William and Hugh. This conversation occurs in the wild natural environment. Instead of talking about the then natural environment, they talk about the death of William's brother. Such chat reflects the social connection of mankind. Even in the natural environment, social connection is still happening due to the fact that mankind is a social creature. In this chat, Hugh tried to comfort William about the death of his brother and ease his guilt for it. Besides, William is from Kentucky and he can be regarded as the representative of Kentucky

cultural consciousness in this trappers troop. Ethically, Hugh respects the death of William's brother and conveys his regards to William.

Regarding example six, it reveals a hard true fact about mankind's social communicative culture, which can be very cruel compared to the warming chat between William and Hugh. Under such cold weather situation, the troop has just gone through some unfortunate events. Physically, they are all male. Mentally, they all have their own respect. Fitzgerald seems very bullying before William and even threatens him with his knife, but he is barely nothing compared to Hugh Glass who knows how to see through people. In this example, "kick, catch, drew to knees, flipped back, pounce to pin knees, skinning knife to throat" all these symbolize the dominating power of Fitzgerald while "helpless face, chest of gasping, a thin line of blood" all these symbolize the kindness instead of weakness of William, because being bullied doesn't mean weak but being kind and good is stronger than anything.

These three examples indicate that living in the natural environment, men may expose their own nature in favor of their own interest due to the grave environment. Besides, it may reveal that man try to overcome the grave natural environment to demonstrate his power before nature. Man use his social operative rule in nature and take nature as an object to overcome. The troop aims to hunt down wildlife and skin them for the furs. This is a cruel and inhumane behavior of man.

#### **4. Case Study on Hugh Glass from the Perspective of Ecological Aesthetic Principles**

Hugh Glass is the main character in *The Revenant*. There can be analyzed by comprehensive theoretical knowledge from the natural quality of the eco-aesthetic principle to the harmony of the ecological integration. That means the case study of any character in *The Revenant* does not go with certain theoretical principle in Chapter two but go with any random and properly adaptable one.

##### **4.1 Analysis on Hugh Glass's Purpose in Nature from the Perspective of Natural Quality**

As it has been described before that the natural quality of eco-aesthetic mainly describes the mankind's purpose in looking at nature and mankind should not take nature as his own purposeful and useful instrument for the sake of his own emotional interest. That means one should not associate nature to any metaphor to release his feelings about nature when he sees something splendid like mountains and rivers. Such behavior can also be traced in *The Revenant*.

Hugh Glass is a man of strong determination and he won't capitulate to the difficulties that nature has bestowed upon him. Instead, he chooses to overcome such difficulties and learns to survive under the crude situation, which reflects the fight between the civilization and the wilderness.

As for the natural quality on Hugh Glass, here are some examples to analyze:

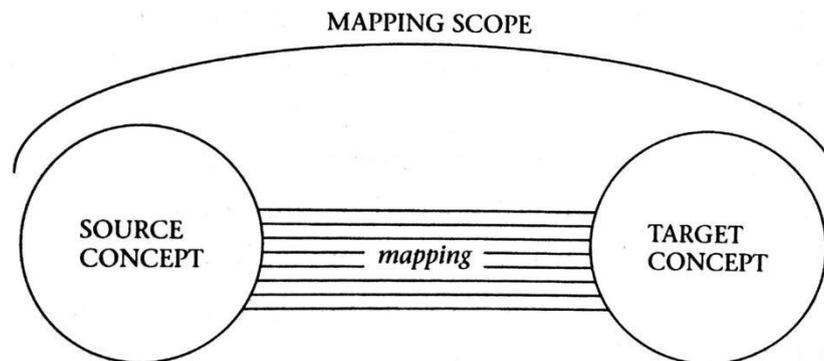
Example 11

*He looked up at the soaring rock formation above the clearing. A lone, twisted pine had managed somehow to grow from the sheer face of the stone. He had stared at it many times, yet it had never appeared to him as it did at that moment, when its perpendicular lines seemed clearly to form a cross. He accepted for the first time that he would die there in that clearing by the spring.*

In this example, it first describes the rock formation, the pine, the stone and the spring. All these demonstrate the crude environment before the invasion of human and the remaking of human's modern instrument. However, such beautiful scene doesn't simply occur for no reason. Hugh Glass looks at such view out of self-purpose of whether he would live or die. Hugh Glass is physically hurt and paralyzed and he can't move but lie down on the ground. The other two, one of which is a child, leave him behind for surviving and getting away with ethic responsibility. Under such situation, Hugh Glass simply takes the environment where he's at and draw the rock, the pine, the stone and the spring together to form an image of a human religion, namely, the cross. From the metaphor Hugh makes of cross, it can be told that Hugh is a Christian and he behaves like any other Christian before the grave situation that he has no help but only gives his hope to God and finds his comfort in belief. He takes the environmental ingredients to make his familiar man-made product to serve his pain with comfort.

Such act is completely against the rule of natural quality which emphasizes that the admiration towards nature should be purposeless and purely out of praising and people can return to their natural quality seeing this. Apparently, Hugh does not see it with strong purpose of look for spiritually comfort.

In this example, there's a metaphor for death. According to the cognitive linguistics, the cognitive approach, as presented so far, focuses on two of its three elements: the tenor, which is now seen as target concept, and the vehicle, now regarded as the source concept of the metaphor [1]. According to the mapping scope, the metaphor is shown as followings:



The first source concept in this example of Hugh Glass is pine and the first target concept is cross. The second concept source is cross and the second target concept is death. There are three components of mapping scope, namely the image schemas, basic correlations and culture-dependent evaluations. As for the image schema grounded in our bodily experiences, the 'cross' schema is shared by all religious people. As for the basic correlation guiding us in understanding the events and actions in the world around us, the 'cross' correlates with 'death' as in the 'purpose  $\diamond$  goal' situation. As for the culture-dependent evaluation restricted to the members of a specific culture, 'perpendicular' is attributed to 'line'.

With the combination of the natural quality and the basic correlation's 'purpose  $\diamond$  goal', Hugh Glass admire nature on the edge of his death out of his human at oriented goal for seeking comfort.

Example 12

*Glass was shredded from head to foot. His scalp lay dangling to one side, and it took Harris an instant to recognize the components that made up his face. Worst was his throat. The grizzly's claws had cut three deep and distinct tracks, beginning at the shoulder and passing straight across his neck. Another inch and the claws would have severed Glass's jugular.*

In this example, it shows out that Hugh Glass aims to shoot down the grizzly and he did but he did it with a huge price of being ferociously attacked by the grizzly. This example depicts the bodily parts of Hugh being attacked very vividly so as to demonstrate the consequence of man not treating nature well. Hugh's purpose in this fight is to get the game and skin it for the fur and such purpose is against the natural quality of mankind admiring nature in a good way. Instead of a good way, Hugh has broken nature and broken the creature which shares the same right of being in this wild environment. Hugh takes away the grizzly's right to live and right to proliferate. He doesn't care for the creature system of nature but the surviving interest of the trappers troop. Such purpose is not good for the development of ecological system and it will continue to lead more creatures to their traps and their profits.

#### 4.2 Analysis on Hugh Glass's Behavior of Living in Nature from the Perspective of Integrity and Engaging Quality

Integrity and Engaging quality are combined together due to their closeness. Integrity focuses on the appreciation of nature from the general view and the engaging quality focuses on the appreciation of nature by letting oneself fully in the nature. They both emphasize the appreciation of nature.

Example 13

*Hugh Glass stared down at the cloven tracks, the deep indentions clear as newsprint in the soft mud. Two distinct sets began at the river's edge, where the deer must have drunk, and then trailed into the heavy cover of the willows. The persistent work of a beaver had carved a trail, now trod by a variety of game. Dung lay piled next to the tracks, and Glass stooped to touch the pea-sized pellets—still warm.*

In this example, Hugh operates the knowledge of logic to examine the “cloven tracks” to find out the deer. The tracks provide him with the knowledge that the deer just passed by and drank by the river. Alongside the lead of the tracks, Hugh discovers the willows, from which he finds out the track of beaver and by examining the dung, he notices that the deer doesn't go too far. All these lines are combined as proof to track down the deer. To survive in nature, Hugh needs to take advantage of any leads that may be left behind by animals in order to hunt them. Instead of admiring the beauty of the flowing river and the waving willows and noticing the biological circle of deer, river, soil and trees, Hugh simply knows that he has to hunt them down and trade them for profits. He doesn't engage himself in the wild nature by returning back to nature with human's true self that mankind is part of nature. However, Hugh at this situation only regards nature as the container for more goods to use. That doesn't help protect the wildlife in it.

#### Example 14

*Glass looked west, where the sun still perched high above the plateau that formed the distant horizon. He guessed there were three hours before sunset. Still early, but it would take the captain and the rest of the men an hour to catch up. Besides, it was an ideal campsite. The river folded gently against a long bar and gravel bank. Beyond the willows, a stand of cottonwoods offered cover for their campfires and a supply of firewood. The willows were ideal for smoke racks. Glass noticed plum trees scattered among the willows, a lucky break. They could grind pemmican from the combined fruit and meat.*

Allen Carlson reckons the eco-aesthetics as a universal aesthetics, and such aesthetics takes ecological integrity as measure and holds order appreciation towards ecological system [2]. In this example, there are several ecological entities. Entity one is the sun, the plateau and the horizon; entity two is the river, the bar and the gravel bank; entity three is the willows and the cottonwoods. These natural environments provide Hugh Glass not just protection but also the materials for surviving in nature. However, the order appreciation of Hugh Glass towards these entities is directed towards the interest of man himself. Entity one tells him the time for when the night will come; entity two tells him where is the best place to settle the hunters; and entity three tells him what he can use to survive the night. As for these three entities, Hugh Glass subconsciously appreciates the given of nature. These entities are unruly and chaotic and the more mysterious they are and the more beautiful they become [2].

Regarding the two examples, the eco-aesthetics not just evaluates the positive side or admires and praises nature, but also evaluates the negative side or criticizes the damage on nature [2]. Hugh Glass does not appreciate nature from the whole frame of nature but from the position of man. He tries to hunt down the wildlife animals by tracking their prints and he uses the possible shelter given by the current situation and the current-made food such as plum and pemmican. These can be regarded as the positive side of nature Hugh Glass appreciates and learns to obey the natural order to perch in nature.

The aesthetic of engagement is built on the view of connection [2]. Hugh Glass in the first example connects the cloven tracks to the river to the deer to the willows to the beavers; and he connects the sun above the plateau to the time to the campsite to the river to the bank to the cottonwoods to the campfire to the firewood to the smoke rack to the pemmican. Hugh really engages himself in nature so that he can realize all these in the wild environment without any convenient man-made instrument. Hugh feels nature by to the most extent releasing his sense organs [2] such as smelling, touching, seeing and feeling. On the other hand, Hugh doesn't really appreciate the integrity of nature out of being who he is but being a job and a hunter which is threatening the wildlife of nature.

## 5. Conclusion

To conclude, ecoliterature criticism sees through the conflicting issues between man and nature, such as hunting, killing, ravaging, etc. To stop such trend, mankind should really look to themselves and take up natural responsibility for what they have done to nature instead of continuing to ravage it. In doing so, it resonates what the ecoliterature criticism aims to promote, that is, the harmony of man and nature.

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