



Reinforcing the Importance of Remembering Our Roots in Daine Wilson's *The Seed Keeper*

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Abstract: The proposed study aims to investigate Daine Wilson's *The Seed Keeper* using an intertextual analysis, through an ecocritical lens drawing upon the theoretical framework established by Lawrence Buell, Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. The novel explores the engagement with ecological consciousness and the ways that literature can influence our understanding of the natural world through our ancestral roots and legacy. Wilson views a significant shift, how nature became an active agent within storytelling today instead of just being a symbolic or picturesque backdrop to a narrative like older times. This narrative emphasizes on interconnectedness of all beings, illustrating the consequences of ecological issues resulting from new modern technologies in farming. She also challenges readers to rethink about the urgency towards ecological responsibilities of human in a dystopian setting.

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, using textual analysis to examine Wilson's depiction of environmental consciousness and respect, its interconnectedness with human and its ancestral roots. With rising environmental issues such as climate change, deforestation, pollution, and species extinction intensifying, ecocriticism scrutinises through a lens which readers can examine literary works, allowing for a layered study of the intricate relationship between human and Earth.

Keywords- Ecological Awareness, Environmental Activism, Ancestral legacy, Interconnectedness, Humankind, Earth.

Introduction:

The word "ecocriticism" was first coined by Rueckert (1978) in his essay *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism*, suggesting that literary works could be looked at through an ecocritical lens to depict how they deal with environmental concerns and also help us to learn more about nature. Ecocriticism, broadly is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment, which emerged as a significant critical literary approach, lately. Scholars tend to literature for surveying how cultural narratives shape human attitudes toward nature. The publication of *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmark in Literary Ecology* (1996) by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, 'ecocriticism' gained prominence and distinguished itself as a coherent academic literary movement. Lawrence Buell's work, *The Environmental Imagination* (1995) established ecocriticism as a field constituting environmentally oriented literature. According to him, "the non-human environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history." In his *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (2005), he argued about cultural attitudes and human behaviour influenced in literature and how literature responds to environmental crisis and natural problems. Since its formation, ecocriticism expanded to approaches such as ecofeminism, postcolonial ecocriticism, zoo-criticism, eco-marxism, eco-spiritualism. This expansion reflects the concerns about the environmental degradation and the requirement for interdisciplinary perspectives. As one of the pioneering figures of ecocriticism, Cheryll Glotfelty, asserts, "ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture." This interrelation shapes the foundation for examining literary texts from environmental contexts, disclosing how writers acknowledge ecological concerns across generations. The rise of this literary criticism has led to readings in contemporary texts, challenging the anthropocentric beliefs often prevalent in literature. By studying texts through an ecocritical lens, it underlines the ethical and philosophical association of human's interactions with the environment. Literature, as a stimulation to society, not only activates the evolving views on the environment but also impacts public insight and viewpoint. This research demonstrates a personal survey into the comprehensive elements of ecocriticism. By tracing the growth of environmental themes in literary studies, this paper attempts to come up with the prevalent ecocritical studies, offering both an analysis of contemplation of the past and a subsequent outlook on literature's job in shaping our environmental awareness.

Through a comprehensive assessment of Wilson's novel, this paper aims to integrate existing understanding, identify key drifts from an ecocritical analysis, and offer perceptions into the broader involvement for the literary study of environmental regeneration. Prefaced with the poem "The Seeds Speak," told from the perspective of stored seeds. "We surrendered our wildness to live in partnership with the Humans. Because we cared for each other, the People and the Seeds survived. For many generations, this

Agreement was kept... Then came a long silence, a drought of memory, a time of darkness.” (p. 12) The lost legacy in the poem describes the bond between the seeds and the Dakota people, held since time immemorial. Yet, ‘the long silence,’ shows the fears of seeds’ opportunity to be planted which was almost gone. It questions the ecological crises and how literary study can stimulate environmental awareness. Freud’s psychological study, stresses on catharsis as essential for healing. Likewise, Wilson portrays Rosalie’s cathartic journey serves as a pathway to her resilience as she gradually confronts her past, rediscovers her roots and reconnects to the land she once called home. Wilson weaves back and forth from Rosalie’s ancestors in the mid-1860s to her present in 2002, giving wider context to the violent history that the characters have experienced in past to reclaiming the past by reconnecting with ancient purpose, in the present. Author notes down in the end matter, about the representation of plants, soil, and ecology which was inspired by a story of Dakota women saving seeds, even after the U.S.-Dakota War, and, in her acknowledgements first thanks, as it is in ‘the seeds’ where both the novel’s heart and its strength lie.

Research Questions:

- How does one’s ancestral root pave a way for reconnection with nature?
- Can nature’s presence in a human narrative considered universal?
- What all steps are taken for the environmental unjust done to the nature?

Objective of Research:

- To explore the relation of ancestral roots of humans and nature.
- To identify how nature as a character shapes human narrative.
- To examine the emergence of environmental activism due to ecological degradation.
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Relation of roots with it legacy:

In the initial chapters we see protagonist Rosalie Iron Wing’s reflections on the original relation with her roots, the changes of the land brought by settlers and the loss of her family’s connection to it. She returns to her family’s abandoned house and haunted by her past memories hinting at deeper personal struggles and the significance of her roots. Rosalie expresses a loss of connection to nature, with physical removal of trees, loss of habitat for wildlife she mentions “my trees are gone” (p. 261) at the cost of modern agricultural practices. This shift in the landscape symbolizes fragility of nature. Her emotional turmoil is justified by recognizing the destructive changes and potential consequences of human actions on her land which she once called her own. She imparts lessons about nature and necessity of survival of wildlife alongside her father’s imparted wisdom. This transformation of gradual encouragement of ethical responsibility towards nature illustrates that even in isolation, connections can be forged, providing purpose.

Ida, Rosalie’s friend shares stories of the land they belonged to, reminding Rosalie of her longing for connection to the Dakota community which she felt alienated from due to her family’s past. Even the woman at the tribal office reveals the tragic history of family separations due to social services in the past and emphasizing the importance of roots. Rosalie embraces her past takes a significant step, with a glimpse of hope for healing and belonging. Rosalie tries instilling in her son Thomas, the wisdom imparted to her by her father about the values of life along with the relation of plants and animals with nature on their lives for human sustenance. Gaby and Rosalie’s conversation about her fascination with gardening even after knowing the painful history of forced farming to gardening being her personal choice to connect with nature. Highlights the importance of finding her ways to safeguard both traditions and the earth.

About bountiful harvests of Iva, the great-great-grandmother of Rosalie, when disrupted by settlers and soldiers during 1870s, only the unearthing of a stash of their last harvest is like a glimmer of hope and a lifeline for their survival in their landscape of despair. Iva teaching her daughter Marie to sow seeds underscores the themes of resilience and the sacred nature of harvesting. This story equates harvesting seeds with survival. With this, Marie, great-great-grandmother of Rosalie, understands her role in safeguarding the seeds. Wilson illuminates this portrayal of adapting cultural practice of seed sowing as a symbolic connection to ancestry of nature in the face of modern adversities. A grown-up Marie when returns to her ancestral land, recalls the struggles they faced to reclaim their home devastated by war, with the ongoing challenges of governmental laws that suppressed their culture. She found solace in gardens and passed on sacred traditions, especially preservation of the seed. Her reflections highlight the importance of remembering one’s roots and maintaining connection through stories, seeds, and shared experiences, despite all the hardships and overwhelming loss.

John’s desperate attempt to reclaim his land that nurtured his family since generations is evident, when he bids a dollar. During the auction, his deep sorrow and anger symbolize the loss family’s history and legacy. His speech highlights his deep-rooted emotional ties to it, memories attached since ages, mainly the injustices inflicted by the corporate machinery on him. This story explicitly equates soil and seeds with survival which is framed as a Native American belief, and a scientific fact too. John’s father used to quote- “The nation that destroys its soil destroys itself- Franklin D. Roosevelt” (p. 102)

Rosalie’s encounter with her community in the latter half of her life throws light on the the deep emotional impact of reconnecting with one’s heritage. Rosalie grapples with her feelings of belonging and identity as she reconnects with Wilma and Carlos, who acknowledge her family heritage by sharing memories of her father, highlighting the importance of connection to one’s past. Rosalie considers reconnecting with her roots and the possibility of finding a living relative Darlene, a connection to a family legacy she feels estranged from, with a bit of hopeful determination. Their conversation reveals Darlene’s long wait to reconnect with Rosalie, emphasizing the deep longing for family that both women have felt. A handwoven basket of cherished seeds as a family history was

handed over to Rosalie. And urges her to cherish and nurture the seeds as if they were her own children. Despite her fragile state, Darlene was determined to pass on her legacy. She also presents Thomas with a preserved cob of corn, as a reminder of their ancestral roots imparting importance of remembering their heritage. This corn cob represented his familial legacy along with tangible connection to his ancestors, challenging him to reflect on his responsibility towards it. Darlene's emphasis on corn inspired him to take a more profound perspective of his heritage as he works on the farm, possibly changing how he approaches his future farming techniques. She teaches that the power and responsibility to influence the future is in our hands even if the past shapes who we are. She reminisces about how these seeds, as well as the rare Dakhóta corn, were intertwined with their family's past carrying the hope of healing and growth. The conversation takes a touching turn when Darlene acknowledges Thomas and the name Rosalie chose for him, "Wakpa" meaning river. Through which she ensures her child carries that legacy and desire to honour nature.

Rosalie's great-great-great-grandfather, Mazakhoyaginape's letters became a bridge between past and present disclosing the stories of her ancestors. On the other hand she was encouraged by Darlene to learn more about the letter. She going to her great-great-grandmother's grave, symbolizes her willingness to reconnect with her roots. Rosalie's dreamlike interaction with Thakoza (her grandmother), makes her aware of planting seeds as a sacred pact with nature that honours her lineage. Carlos encourages Rosalie to plant a garden with the precious seeds she has received, suggesting that heritage and identity are deeply tied to agriculture and the care of the land- "Just think of the stories these seeds are carrying." (p. 287) Rosalie actively participates in the revival of her heritage affirming the importance of her culture in the face of historical erasure. To revive her family's agricultural legacy, together with her friend Ida, Rosalie works hard to plant traditional Dakota wamnaheza corn, which her ancestors had grown even before their displacement in 1863. Through the act of preserving seeds Marie and Ina's efforts symbolize their belief in eventual recovery and renewal.

By recognizing each seed as a 'miniature time capsule,' embodiment of decades of passed on stories of it. She saves the seeds, connects her life story with those of the plants bridging an intricate relationship between humans and nature. Rosalie digging her hands into the soil symbolizes her need for grounding to her roots amidst the upheaval in her life and moment of reflection where she reaffirming her bond with the land and her cultural identity. This revival of cultural identity reflects the emotional weight that accompanies her with the differing experiences of individuals tied to ancestral land.

Symbolism and Imagery of nature:

Nature can be nurturing and harsh both. Holding a promise of sustenance, through the interaction of forest, river, plants, seeds and animals along with the challenges faced due to environmental changes and warfare. As Rosalie tends to garden, she feels a comforting continuity of her environment around. However, the snow-covered woods and the slow thaw of spring, encodes the themes of survival, resilience, and renewal. While the impending cold winter, chilly autumn environment juxtaposes the warmth of memories reflect the upcoming challenges that threaten to disrupt her stability. The characterization of weather mirrors the chapter's themes of uncertainty about the future.

The seeds represent means of survival, cultural legacy with a hope from future generations. They are a tangible connection to the ancestral traditions reminding Rosalie of her father and great grand parents and their agricultural roots, which provided with strength and identity amidst adversity. They embody the idea of preservation and nurturing life, tying into a larger theme of sacrifices made to protect one's heritage even at the face of destruction. The seeds' preservation amid chaos underscores the necessity of remembering and safeguarding traditions representing continuity of Rosalie's ancestry.

While the river symbolizes flow of life, sustenance, and an interrelation among their community and the environment. Rosalie realises through her environmental activism that taking care of the river, her family and the larger ecosystem are similar to each other and interconnected too. Much of the past continues to exist in the present as the it runs through the bloodstream, DNA, through the water, and through the land affecting every life that at present. Rosalie's decision to name her child with a Dakota name of water, stands as reclaiming of her heritage and cultural identity. As Rosalie puts it, "History might have cost me my family and my language, but I was reclaiming a relationship with the earth, water, stars, and seeds that was thousands of years old." (p. 294)

Ecological stewardship:

Rosalie resonates deeply with her responsibility towards environment along with her friend Gaby when discovers about her from an article. Gaby advocates against the chemical runoff in the Minnesota River that stresses the impact of farming practices on water's degrading quality, affecting their tribal lands and leading to dead zones in larger bodies of water. Gaby despite all her hard work as a lawyer, faces setbacks while advocating for the cleanup of the Minnesota River. Gaby's role as the community outreach director for the "Save Our Rivers" task force symbolizes her commitment to fighting for the health of the river, struggles to safeguard environmental degradation and her fight for indigenous rights, illustrates her environmental stewardship. She expressed her commitment to environmental laws, emphasizing the importance of advocating for their land and water urging Rosalie to take a stand for their heritage and the planet. Rosalie shares vital information about the impact of modern farming, industrial chemicals and waterways. While Rosalie's journey symbolizes a pursuit of authenticity and responsibility on the other hand it raises questions about the sustainability of journalism through Ralph, the editor of newspaper where she works. It keeps us pondering about the need for revenue that can compromise ethical reporting and environmental issues and public awareness.

However, with the challenges of farming being ever-present we see a broader issue affecting agriculture. With drought affecting the farm, the new genetically modified seed technology from Monsanto company arose tension among local farmers like John, Rosalie's husband. Deep-rooted fears about reliance on chemical companies emerged along with the idea of increased yields and profits from it. However, this new farming methods came at the cost of her values related to environmental sustainability. With the economic pressures mounting around the characters and policies negatively impacting farmers, Rosalie's concern about the environmental impact of these genetically altered seeds is vivid afterwards. Rosalie voiced her concerns about the ethics and safety of Monsanto's practices by challenging Mayor about the potential dangers of the modern seed technology.

Rosalie embraces traditional methods of gardening, nurturing her plants and saving natural seeds. She discovers the intricate beauty and individuality of seeds, personifying them as living beings with their own stories. Reverence for traditional farming practices and valuing ecological health of nature alongside the efficient and profitable modern agricultural methods gives a contrasting approach of Rosalie and John. This conflict emphasizes the struggle faced for preserving ancestral practices and adapting to the changes in agricultural technology.

Conclusion:

Research portrays themes of reconnection, the complexity of family relationships, and the search for identity in the midst of loss. It moves beyond traditional human centric literary studies to encouraging ethical responsibility towards nature. Wilson's *The Seed Keeper* analyses that both in heritage and personal history, by connecting with your roots, one can find the strength to rise again. She worked on psychological depth, historical richness and cultural values. Despite all the turmoil, their actions reflect a deep-seated hope for the continuity of their culture and tradition. The dual journey of nurturing the land connected to ancestry, weights a responsibility as a seed keeper.

Through Gaby, who becomes a river activist, the idea of chemicals in the river is equivalent to that in a human body. Through John, we see the dilemma that many farmers face today as they navigate modern agriculture for short-term economic gain and long-term ecological repercussions, is evident in this book. Considering the seeds, one has the potential to flourish even in the toughest conditions. Seeds embody traditions, and a deeper connection to ancestors and the natural world much more than just agricultural resources. Her commitment to save the seeds serve as both a personal rebellion and a deliberate reminder of the interconnectedness of life. While the narrative suggests that such reconnections inherently lead to healing and consciousness aligning with sociological studies on identity. Depending on personal and familial histories, the journey back to one's roots can be fraught with pain, nostalgia, or even discord. It is important to acknowledge that others might face difficulties in preventing a seamless integration or sense of belonging, while Wilson illustrates a hopeful reconciliation in the end. Rosalie's inner turmoil about leaving her current life, hinting at deeper personal struggles and the significance of home. She evolved through the Intergenerational ties that bind families, embracing the strength that comes from understanding and honouring her roots. she confronts her family's painful history and through her experiences, she learns the importance of connection to the land and shared stories carried along generations. It's a blend of essential relationship between nature, culture, memory, and legacy. Through caring for seeds and wisdom imparted by her elders, she acknowledges her role as steward of the earth. It encourages us readers to advocate for practices that honoring traditional practices related to our biodiversity and consider their impact on nature.

Wilson's novel raises serious issues around real environmental and ethical concerns that come with its chemical farming, genetic engineering and patented seeds and the importance of living in harmony with earth's rhythm. Eco-critics praise the novel's ability to encourage ecological empathy and its stimulation towards environmental activism. Whereas, climate fiction serves as a vehicle for dystopian literature and a vital form of ecological narrative that foster readers to reconnect with the planet earth.

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