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A Study of Disability and Game Theory in Jane Austen's *Emma* (1815) and Selected Adaptations

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Abstract
This comparative study of Jane Austen's *Emma* (1815) and its selected adaptations (1996A, 1996B, 2009, 2020) focuses on the portrayal of visible and invisible disabilities in the characters of Mr. Woodhouse, Mrs. Bates, and Jane Fairfax, analyzing their decision-making processes through the lens of game theory to evaluate whether the characters achieve desired outcomes. Key scenes involving disabled characters are closely examined and compared. Findings indicate that Mr. Woodhouse suffers from dementia, hypochondria, and age-related limitations. Despite these challenges, he achieves his objective of keeping Emma by his side. Mrs. Bates's visual and hearing impairments due to her old age are portrayed similarly, except in O'Hanlon's adaptation (2009), in which she does not have hearing problems. Her disability impacts her reliance on her daughter and her decision-making. Jane Fairfax's fears of future financial instability and the complexity of her secret engagement pressuring her are successfully navigated as she marries without provoking suspicion. The research contributes to the intersection of disability studies and game theory as represented in media. The findings of this study offer a new perspective on the existing studies about disabled characters as the research compares their portrayal as well as their decision-making in the novel and the adaptations.

Keywords: Jane Austen, Emma, Disability Studies, Game Theory, Movie Adaptations

Introduction

Jane Austen's (1775-1817) works which have been long celebrated for an intricate portrayal of Regency-era manners and romance, have the less discussed yet significant threads of sickness and disability. The recurring motif of illness or some other affliction in her novels, from Dashwood sisters in Sense and Sensibility (1811) to Miss Lambe in Sanditon (1817), have invited scholars to explore her works through the lens of Disability Studies (Watson, 1970). On the other hand, Michael Chwe (2013), a game theorist at UCLA, argues that, Austen is considered a game theorist for her insightful exploration of choice, preference, and strategic thinking in her novels. His ideas will be useful for this research. Characters with strategic thinking in Austen's novels try to achieve their desired payoffs and consider how others will act when they choose to do something.

Emma (1815/2012), the last novel published in Austen's lifetime, tells the story of Emma Woodhouse, a charming, wealthy young woman in the village of Highbury who delights in matchmaking for others, often with misguided results. Emma's father, Mr. Woodhouse, is an elderly man who has behaved as "quite an invalid" all his life (p. 190). But Emma is mindful of her responsibilities as a daughter, knowing that "He was a nervous man, easily depressed" (p. 5). Some scholars, such as Gullette (2009), believe Mr. Woodhouse suffers from dementia and has problems recalling some incidents. Moreover, Mr. Woodhouse often invites the Bates family to his house. The old widowed Mrs. Bates lives poorly with her daughter, Miss Bates and relies heavily on her daughter's care. Mrs. Bates' granddaughter is the orphaned Jane Fairfax, who is often described as poor and sickly and looks "as low as possible" (p. 261).

Studying Austen's adaptations is essential to analyzing various interpretations of these issues by filmmakers. The present study compares the portrayal of disability and agency in *Emma* (1815/2012) and four adaptations of this novel. The selected adaptations are the popular adaptations from the 1990s onwards in English language and they all align with the novel's setting and fidelity. The first adaptation of *Emma* (1815/2012) to be studied in this research was directed by Douglas McGrath (1958-2022) in 1996 and was a production of Matchmaker Films and Haft Entertainment. The subsequent adaptation was directed by Diarmuid Lawrence (1947-2019) and produced by A & E Network, months later in the same year. In 2009, Jim O'Hanlon (1970-) directed the four-part BBC television drama serial. The latest movie adaptation with the title *EMMA.*, was directed by Autumn de Wilde (1970-) in 2020 and was produced by Focus Features and Working Title Films. This study will compare the portrayals of disability and game theory in the novel and the adaptations to explore how the disabled characters achieve their desired payoffs.

Review of Literature

Virginia Woolf (1930) in an essay aims to make illness a legitimate literary topic equal in importance to love, jealousy, and conflict. Woolf discusses how illness can cause even the most

mature adults to feel like children again and about the isolation, loneliness, and vulnerability that it can bring. She discusses how unlike other topics, illness which everyone experiences, does not figure prominently in literature. She believes illness so prevalent and capable of bringing about change, it was not discussed nearly as much as she would have thought in her day.

A number of scholars have previously studied Jane Austen's six novels through the lens of disability studies. Steel (1982) in an article discusses the concept of sickness and health in Jane Austen's works. According to Steel, there is no such thing as an accident in Austen's works, and even a sprained ankle in works such as *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) and her unfinished novel *Sanditon* (1817) has significance.

The growing popularity of film and cinema among people made media an important aspect of disability portrayal. Filmmakers have chosen to show disability differently across various forms of media, and the ways they have done their job impact perceptions of disability in society. Over time, the representations of people with disabilities in motion pictures have changed, constantly reflecting or influencing society's attitudes and views. However, the form of disability itself is not easy to identify. In their book, Smit and Enns (2001) gave an overview of traditional methods for analyzing disability portrayals in cinema, showed where the study of cinema and disability began and also suggested new directions for the study of film and disabilities.

Integrating disability studies into film studies has led to a critical examination of how films represent disabled characters. Turner's (2001) book discusses the use of film as a social practice, which can be extended to the portrayal of disability, emphasizing how films reflect and shape public perceptions of disability. By analyzing the narrative and visual elements of films through the lens of disability studies, scholars can interrogate the ideologies that influence character development and the societal expectations they embody.

According to a study by Hoeksema and Smit (2001), The film industry has continued or begun various stereotypes over time as a common practice of exclusion, stereotypes so lasting and widespread that they have become society's widespread view of individuals with disabilities, overshadowing or even replacing their own self-perception. There has been a wide variety of cinematic portrayals of individuals with disabilities. Sometimes, they feature incorrect images and other times, they depict disabilities accurately, and they can impact society's viewpoints. Films show stereotypical portrayals of reality and can also question them. Furthermore, the essay notes that the fundamental strength of movies lies in their capacity to evoke viewers' emotions regarding the complexities of human life. This concept should be acknowledged and appreciated as a powerful filmmaking tool.

In his book, Chwe (2013), discusses how all works of Jane Austen show that game theory is present in all human behavior. The chapters include strategic plans, choice and preferences in Austen's novels, highlighting how characters engage in Strategic Thinking and manipulation to achieve their goals. He also shows how some of the characters are not fully aware of their actions and how characters' choices and actions impact the outcomes of their relationships and interactions. In a chapter he briefly analyses *Emma* (1815/2012) focusing on the protagonist's strategic thinking and social interactions. The analysis highlights Emma's overconfidence, sense of entitlement, and the consequences of her strategic decisions. It also discusses the dynamics of social status and the impact of Emma's actions on those around her. This book is an important source for the present study. The disabled characters' strategic thinking, their choices, and how they impact the other characters and whether they get what they want or not will be analyzed through game theory in this research.

Tom Shakespeare (2017), in his book, explores the complex relationship between old age and disability, emphasizing that aging is often accompanied by various physical and cognitive impairments that can be framed as disabilities. He argues that societal attitudes toward aging often reinforce negative stereotypes, portraying older individuals as frail or dependent, thus reinforcing the stigma of disability. He suggests that old age should be understood through a more inclusive lens, recognizing the intersectionality of age and disability. This perspective is crucial for analyzing Mr. Woodhouse and Mrs. Bates, whose aging and associated disabilities are central to their portrayal in the novel and its adaptations.

Methodology

This study examines the portrayal of the disabled characters (Mr. Woodhouse, Mrs. Bates, and Jane Fairfax) in the selected adaptations. A qualitative approach will be employed to analyze key scenes involving these characters, paying particular attention to how their disabilities are depicted. By examining the text of the novel alongside its adaptations, this study explores how these characters achieve their desired outcomes despite the limitations imposed by their disabilities. This analysis will provide insights into the different ways disability is portrayed across mediums, considering factors such as dialogue and visual representation in movie adaptations.

Results

This section presents the findings from the analysis of the portrayal of disability and agency in Austen's novel *Emma* (1815/2012) and its selected adaptations, beginning with the novel and then the adaptations in order. In the novel, Mr. Woodhouse is described as an anxious character preoccupied with health and safety. His constant concerns about illness and discomfort affect his interactions, making him averse to social gatherings and changes in routine. His decision-making is driven by a need to control his environment, heavily influencing Emma's life choices, particularly her decision to stay at Hartfield after marriage.

In McGrath's 1996 adaptation Mr. Woodhouse is played by Denys Hawthorne (1932-2008). He is depicted as an elderly, anxious man, frequently seen sitting by the fireplace. His health worries are prominent, but his influence on others is minimal beyond Emma, who prioritizes his comfort by staying at Hartfield. Lawrence's 1996 adaptation emphasizes his reliance on routine and a controlled environment. Mr. Woodhouse is played by Bernard Hepton (1925-2018). His discomfort with change and preference for quiet gatherings are highlighted, affecting Emma's decisions. In O'Hanlon's 2009 adaptation Mr. Woodhouse is played by Michael Gambon (1940-2023). The adaptation shows his backstory by depicting the loss of his wife, showing his fear of losing loved ones. In de Wilde's 2020 adaptation Mr. Woodhouse, played by Bill Nighy (1949-), is physically active, and his health obsessions, like drafts and chills are shown comedically. His controlling behavior remains central, though his involvement in Emma's marriage decisions is minimized, showing him more at ease with changes.

Mrs. Bates, the widow of a former vicar, lives a quiet life with her daughter, Miss Bates, in modest conditions. She is described as a quiet old lady often seen knitting in the background. Due to her old age, she uses spectacles and has some hearing loss. Mrs. Bates does not speak directly in the novel; instead, her daughter frequently speaks on her behalf, expressing her gratitude toward their kind neighbors.

In McGrath's 1996 adaptation, Mrs. Bates, played by Phyllida Law (1932-), is depicted as a quiet, passive figure, often sitting or needing help to walk. She wears spectacles, remains silent, and appears confused in social settings. Miss Bates often speaks for her and includes her in conversations by repeating words louder. In Lawrence's 1996 adaptation, Sylvia Barter (1912-2007) portrays Mrs. Bates as a passive presence, mostly sitting and nodding or smiling. She does not engage in conversations, and Miss Bates reminds others of her hearing issues. O'Hanlon's 2009 adaptation shows Valerie Lilley's (1939-) Mrs. Bates initially more active in a brief backstory but silent afterward. She is seen sitting or in a wheelchair, and in the final episode, she speaks for the first time, requesting to see Mrs. Weston's baby. In de Wilde's 2020 adaptation, Myra McFayden's (1956-2024) Mrs. Bates is depicted as both mute and deaf, relying entirely on Miss Bates for communication. Her passivity and moments of confusion, like standing up mistakenly in church, add a touch of humor to her portrayal.

Jane Fairfax, an orphan raised by the Campbells, faces a challenging situation due to her limited financial prospects. Despite being talented and clever, her vulnerability as a potential governess adds stress, worsened by her secret engagement with Frank Churchill. Jane struggles with uncertainty about Frank's intentions and experiences headaches. Her goal is to maintain their secret engagement and have a financially secured future.

In McGrath's 1996 adaptation, Polly Walker (1966-) portrays Jane with little focus on her poor health, emphasizing her talents and secret relationship with Frank. Her decision to stay with her family is portrayed as voluntary rather than health-related. The director subtly shows the couple together in a few carefully crafted scenes. However, other characters seem clueless about their relationship. In Lawrence's 1996 adaptation, Olivia Williams (1968-) plays Jane, focusing on her struggle to find a job as a governess. The film highlights her strategic avoidance of revealing her secret relationship with Frank. Jane's frustration with Mrs. Elton's job offers and her attempt to maintain composure illustrate her inner conflicts. She ultimately marries Frank without becoming a governess. Laura Pyper (1980-) plays Jane in O'Hanlon's 2009 adaptation, where her situation contrasts sharply with Emma's. The adaptation emphasizes Jane's exhaustion. Her decision to leave and accept a governess position shows her distress. After the engagement is revealed, she and Frank seek Emma's forgiveness and friendship. In de Wilde's 2020 adaptation, Amber Anderson (1992-) portrays a reserved Jane, focusing on avoiding any personal discussion about Frank. Her interactions with Mrs. Elton are minimal. Jane appears content and healthy, happily attending Emma's wedding with Frank.

Discussion

This section explores and compares the implications of the findings presented in the results, focusing on the portrayal of disabilities and payoffs of Mr. Woodhouse, Mrs. Bates, and Jane Fairfax in the novel and the selected adaptations directed by McGrath (1996), Lawrence (1996), O'Hanlon (2009), and de Wilde (2020).

Mr. Woodhouse

"Having been a valetudinarian all his life" (p. 2), conversations with Mr. Woodhouse usually revolve around his worries. "His spirits required support," and he hated "change of every kind" (p. 7). He prefers calm, controlled environments. For instance, the narrator states, "The quietness of the game made it particularly eligible for Mr. Woodhouse, who had often been distressed by the more animated sort" (p. 239). Mr. Woodhouse' direct statement, "If I had but her memory. But I can remember nothing" (p. 58), shows his struggle with memory loss. Dementia is a condition "mainly associated with ageing" (Shakespeare, 2017, p. 4). According to Gullette (2009), It is difficult to satirize Mr. Woodhouse in a way that aligns with Austen's language and moral principles because he is incapable of cognitive improvement.

There is a possibility that everyone experiences disability because everyone will age and develop limitations or impairments (Shakespeare, 2017). Elderly individuals are often respected, but facing disability in old age is considered "inevitable" (Shakespeare, 2017, p. 24). According to Shakespeare (2017), The needs of individuals with disabilities vary, and their levels of disadvantage are not the same. Emma reassures her father that they can frequently visit Mrs. Weston, "nobody thought of your walking. We must go in the carriage, to be sure" (p. 7). Mr. Woodhouse mentions his routine for short walks, "I am a very slow walker, and my pace would be tedious to you" (p. 42). Also, he "could not be induced to get so far as London,

even for poor Isabella's sake" (p. 67). Even though he misses his daughter and grandchildren, he does not visit them in London because he believes "nobody is healthy in London" (p. 74). His constant concern for health and well-being underscores aging struggles. Hypochondria is an anxiety disorder. Individuals experience excessive concern about their health, and often discuss health-related matters.

Mr. Woodhouse' characteristics and disabilities affect the way he makes decisions and achieves his desired payoff. According to Chwe (2013), his "understanding cannot overcome the difference in age", and the age gap between Emma and her father is "much increased by his constitution and habits" (p. 4). That is why he is considered "no companion" (p. 2) for Emma even though she loves him dearly. Despite his apparent cluelessness, it is arguable that in different situations, Mr. Woodhouse tries to maintain control over his environment to ensure stability. "Mr. Woodhouse' habits and inclination being consulted in everything" (p. 78). He has a tendency to maintain a status quo. He seeks to minimize threats to his health and stability and uses his concern for health as a persuasive tool to influence those around him. His anxiety makes others reconsider their actions. For instance, when the Westons are planning a ball, Mr. Woodhouse prefers to avoid having the doors open. He "opposed it earnestly on the score of health" (p. 171). Eventually, "every door was now closed, the passage plan given up" (p. 171).

Mr. Woodhouse has fortune, and his residence at Hartfield allows him "to command the visits of his own little circle, in a great measure, as he liked" (p. 15). He creates a favorable condition for himself to have his preferred circle over and chooses not to have "much intercourse with any families beyond that circle" (p. 15). He tries to control what his guests eat and minimizes the risk of getting anxious about their poor health. His "horror of late hours, and large dinner-parties" allows others to "visit him on his own terms" (p. 16). Emma reassures her father that she will not leave him. When she wants to marry Mr. Knightley, they try to think about solutions that would not distress him. His need influences Emma's decision to remain at Hartfield. Mr. Knightley initially thinks of bringing Mr. Woodhouse and Emma to Donwell, but he knows this "would be a risk of her father's comfort" (p. 308). Eventually, Mr. Knightley decides "he should be received at Hartfield" (p. 308). Mr. Woodhouse approves of their marriage, knowing that he can have Mr. Knightley protect him from any dangers. His payoff is his comfort and security from staying at Hartfield, having his daughter, and Mr. Knightley, to protect him and his peace of mind. Mr. Woodhouse influences the plot and the lives of those around him, demonstrating his subtle form of agency.

The following paragraphs will focus on the way Mr. Woodhouse is portrayed in the selected adaptations. In McGrath's 1996 adaptation he is an old man with gray hair. He is frequently shown sitting down next to a fireplace. He walks short distances, and Emma or Isabella often hold his hand. When he walks, he relies on his cane. Another assistance tool Mr. Woodhouse uses are spectacles when sitting and reading at 55:13. Mr. Woodhouse' anxiety is shown in the first scene he appears on the screen. He is not having fun at Mrs. Weston's wedding.

He continues to refer to Mrs. Weston as “Miss Taylor” (12:01). He tells Mr. Elton that the church is "so drafty" (3:15). However, his worries do not affect the environment, and Mr. Elton wants to distract him. Mr. Woodhouse still impacts Emma’s behavior since she tells Mrs. Weston, "I have to take father home" (3:40).

Mr. Woodhouse is not seen socializing with others but mostly his circle of close friends. He is selective about appearing in different places as well. For instance, he mentions, "the Coles are nice people, but we should have to go outside to go there" (55:12). His reminders of others leaving him impacts Emma’s decisions. Emma tells Mr. Knightley, “First my sister, then Mrs. Weston, I don't think he could bear my leaving” and “I cannot abandon him” (1:53:03). Mr. Knightley, who also cares about Mr. Woodhouse' well-being says, “I could not secure your happiness by attacking your father's” (1:53:13). He asks Emma to let him join them at Hartfield. Mr. Woodhouse' reaction to their marriage is positive as he stands up and hugs Emma when he hears the news.

On the other hand, Lawrence's 1996 adaptation is more focused on Mr. Woodhouse persuading others to do the things he wants. He is only convinced with Emma’s marriage when he is told that Mr. Knightley can protect him. He is usually seen sitting in his living room in comfortable sofas, carried in carriages, or assisted by others, making him look the most dependent as an old man. In contrast, Mr. Woodhouse in de Wilde’s (2020) adaptation uses the stairs, sometimes walks quickly, and does not need walking assistance. Although not mentioned in the novel, Mr. Woodhouse uses spectacles at least once in all adaptations except in the 2020 adaptation, and none of the adaptations portray his dementia. In O’Hanlon’s (2009) adaptation, as he “watched his wife leave him for the last time, Mr. Woodhouse resolved never to let his daughters out of sight again" (ep. 1, 1:05). He values his daily routine and controls his social interactions to maintain his comfort. Additionally, O'Hanlon's 2009 adaptation includes Emma and Mr. Knightley's honeymoon, which is not found in the novel. Mr. Woodhouse allows her to go after a heartfelt conversation with Emma. Isabella and her family stay with Mr. Woodhouse. Isabella mentions, "It is a miracle that Father was persuaded to let them go at all, ever" (ep. 4, 51:40).

Mrs. Bates

While Mrs. Bates and her daughter (Miss Bates) are financially at risk, their well-supportive neighbors commit to helping them through occasional aid. Miss Bates often expresses their gratitude. She mentions that they have "everything they could wish for" because of their friends who are "only too good to" them (p. 120). Mrs. Bates is “the quiet neat old lady” who “with her knitting” (p. 107) sits at a corner. Miss Bates mentions that her mother sees “with the help of spectacles” (p. 109) because of her old age. Miss Bates says, “my mother does not hear; she is a little deaf…” (p. 109). Miss Bates “repeated twice before the good old lady could comprehend it” (p. 109). Certain impairments can impede social interactions, for instance, individuals with speech or hearing impairments. Hard-of-hearing individuals may experience

significant isolation due to communication difficulties (Rose, 2006). Disability can lead to a sense of isolation, both physically and emotionally. As Virginia Woolf notes (1930), this sense of separation highlights the loneliness that often accompanies illness, as those who are unwell struggle to communicate their experiences to those who are healthy.

All adaptations show her isolation from the other characters and her inability to interact socially. In all the adaptations except O'Hanlon's (2009), she is portrayed as a mute and deaf character who uses spectacles with limited physical activity. In McGrath's 1996 adaptation Miss Bates frequently uses "us" or "we" in her sentences, ensuring that Mrs. Bates is included. For instance, at 8:17, Miss Bates says, "We're so obliged for you having us tonight" (8:45). In O'Hanlon's 2009 adaptation, Mrs. Bates' physical disability is the most highlighted as she is shown on a wheelchair. It is apparent that she chooses not to speak after Jane's departure. Mrs. Bates has only brief appearances, sitting next to Jane for a few seconds in the second episode, rarely making eye-contact with others, and absent in the third. In the last episode, Mrs. Bates speaks again. She tells Miss Bates, "Wheel me over there. I want to see Mrs. Weston's new baby" (ep. 4, 49:58). Miss Bates helps with her wheelchair and tells the guests, "Mother has found her voice" (ep 4, 50:02).
The 2020 adaptation by de Wilde tends to show her as a comedic figure who stands out because of her disability. When Mr. Elton speaks loudly at the church, Mrs. Bates mistakenly thinks she has to stand up. This leads to a moment of comedy as almost half the present audience looks at her (1:6:18). Her role is primarily passive as she is mute and deaf. She attends gatherings but relies on Miss Bates to engage with others on their behalf. All in all, although there is no access to Mrs. Bates' goals and thoughts, she keeps having her comfort and social respect by maintaining a passive role and relying on her daughter throughout the story, and her limited agency is portrayed similarly in all the adaptations.

Jane Fairfax

Jane Fairfax is "the orphaned" (p. 113) child of Miss Bates's sister. From Emma's viewpoint, her behavior is "quite a separate puzzle" (p. 197). She is handsome and clever but poor, and her situation is complex and stressful. Despite her economic vulnerability, she navigates her limited options with her decision-making. Jane Fairfax is anxious about her unknown future. She deals with economic vulnerability and is expected to become a governess. Her invisible disabilities pressure her to the point of becoming sick and having headaches. It is perhaps a psychosomatic illness that Jane experiences.

In the adaptations, she is reserved and portrayed using the same strategies in her interactions. Her reason for coming back to Highbury is portrayed differently. In McGrath's 1996 adaptation, Jane's return to Highbury is framed as her personal choice for spending her holidays with her family (49:0). In Lawrence's 1996 version, it is her choice to come back and think about searching for a job. Compared to the other versions, Lawrence's 1996 adaptation emphasizes her economic vulnerability. In O'Hanlon's 2009 adaptation the reason for her

returning is not mentioned, and she remains more mysterious. Finally, in de Wilde's 2020 adaptation Jane is back to be taken care of because of her illness.

In all the adaptations except McGrath's 1996 version, Jane tells Emma that she is leaving the gathering. Therefore, McGrath's 1996 adaptation does not emphasize Jane's invisible disability as much as the others. It also shows her mostly as healthy. The 2020 adaptation is the only adaptation that does not mention Jane experiencing headaches after Box Hill. Jane plays the piano in the novel and adaptations. Chwe (2013) argues that Jane and Frank are not able to speak openly due to their secret marriage, and because of that, "Jane speaks, in effect, through the piano" (as cited in Wiltshire, 1992, p. 71). Jane, the highly strategic character who deals with anxiety, poor health, and economic vulnerability, manages her plan successfully. Her high payoff is managing to keep her engagement a secret from other characters and have her promised financial situation and husband. Although her imperfect information about Frank's strategies affects her anxiety, she tries to avoid rising suspicion.

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The Healing Cycle of the Psyche and Nature: Eco-psychological Reading of Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer*

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Abstract

Nature is a live psychotherapeutic agent who offers psychological peace. The past few decades, a field entitled "eco-psychology" has emerged with the purpose of studying the relationship between man's psyche and environmental crises. Eco-psychology is a newly-emerged, yet fast-developing, interdisciplinary field which integrates diverse fields such as psychology, sociology, ethics, and environmental studies. This paper has effectively contextualized Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer* (2000), within the framework of eco-psychology to elaborate on the novel's ecological themes as well as characters' engagement with the natural world. The significant issue raised in Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer*, is the positive psychological effects that intimacy and connection with nature bestows on humans. The novel is indicative of key concepts such as biophilia, ecological unconscious, ecopsychology, and ecotherapy, which were first introduced to the field of ecopsychology by eminent theorists, Edward Wilson, Theodore Roszak and Linda Buzzel. The study aims to indicate how reconciliation with the environment procures indescribable healing in man's psyche and the communication with it leads to a psychological and emotional balance. The research not only intends to display how man and nature are deeply bound, but also delineates the fact that man's alienation from nature has a deep effect on his psychological instability. In the field of literary studies, the presented research is fresh as above all, nature has a special upshot on the human psyche and life.