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"The Great Fire of London and the Ecocritical Debate in John Dryden's Annus Mirabilis"

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ABSTRACT

This paper displays how Dryden's metaphorical representations of natural elements in the Fire section of his historic poem *Annus Mirabilis* have foregrounded the ecocritical readings of human-environmental relationships, particularly with respect to the impact of the intriguing web of the sociopolitical facts on the London community. The paper uncovers Dryden's timid perspective on the environment as a sociopolitical entity that dominates and manipulates humans' lives, which is a typical practice of the ecocritical theory. The methodology adopted in this research is both qualitative and interpretive, as it focuses on the prevalent metaphoric representations of the ecological dilemma as uniquely used by the poet in two discrete stages: first, the ecological insights of Dryden's animation of the natural through water/fire tropes, and second, the metamorphosis of the city as an ecological outcome of the metaphoric animation. Both stages reveal that Dryden's delineation of the 1666 conflagration in *Annus Mirabilis* has figuratively and intellectually foregrounded the key tenets of ecocriticism.

Ecocriticism and the Human-Nonhuman Battle

In "The Hitchhiker's Guide to Ecocriticism," Ursula K. Heise traces the early beginnings of ecocriticism to the 1990s' "transition" of literary criticism as a discrete discipline into a set of subdisciplines that adopt "diverse specialties and methodologies" (505). Such characteristic diversity and the different alliances with other scientific, cultural, and sociopolitical forces have given way to ecocriticism as it is known today (506). The dissolution of environmentalism into subdisciplines encouraged the modest emergence of ecocritical thinking which appeared under different titles relating literature and literary criticism to the environment, to be recognized later as two massive branches, deep and social ecology. While deep ecology values nature "in and of itself," social ecology values it in its "human uses" and the "affinities" it has with different political philosophies (507). Though the beginnings of ecocriticism were grounded in deep ecology, its development showed gradual alignment with social ecology (507).

Theorists and critics have been equally grappling with ecocriticism as a branch of knowledge that centers on some prefixed connection to ecology, and they mostly introduce this evolving discipline as the study of the interconnections between literature and nature as a sophisticated entity that requires man's full attention, cooperation, and respect. The most essential of such definitions to the purpose of the current study of Dryden's poem is William Howarth's definition of ecocriticism as "an interdisciplinary science" that integrates the principles of ecology, ethics, criticism, language, and literature into a new framework that studies the historic relation of nature, mankind, and their social life interaction and the representations of this interaction in culture and literature (71). From this inclusive perspective, ecocriticism implies an "ecological literacy" that equips the ecocritic "with a view toward celebrating nature, berating its despoilers, and reversing their harm through political action" (69). This paper reads the Great Fire of London as an ecological crisis that tests the relations between humans and their immediate environment in ways that *celebrate* nature as a supreme power, *berate* its despoilers, and *reverse* the inflicted harm through sociopolitical action.

Dryden's delineation of the Great Fire creates an inseparable connection between fire as natural/ecological predicament and the dissidence of the "ignoble crowds" (*Annus Mirabilis* st. 250). This interconnection between mankind (i.e., the sociopolitical implications of the crisis) and the biotic world (i.e., the wild natural forces) also reflects the dominant principles of ecocriticism as an interdisciplinary field. Cheryll Glotfelty's definition, for example, represents ecocriticism as an earth-centered approach to literary studies (xviii). Glen A. Love asserts that the object of this discipline is to foster an ethical bond with nature by raising man's "ecoconsciousness" of the innate "complexity" of the universe (230). The same proposition of the ethical premises of ecocritical writings is reiterated by Thomas Claviez who rules out the "scientific or purely instrumental" approach to nature and instead asserts that humans' ethical connection to nature ensures the survival of both (436). This ethical assertion reduces the presumed otherness of man and nature. Writing nature by exploring its "otherness," Scott Slovic argues, is a way for exploring the "dimensions" and "limitations" of the human self as well: "It is only by testing the boundaries of self against an outside medium (such as nature) that many nature writers manage to realize who *they are* and what's what in the world" (352-353).

This preoccupation with the kind of relationship that humans should have to their natural world constitutes what Timothy Clark describes as the "moral impetus behind ecocriticism" which widens the scope of nature writing by looking beyond human centrism as the "sole point of reference and context" (5-6):

> For an environmental critic, every account of a natural, semi-natural or urban landscape must represent an implicit re-engagement with what 'nature' means or could mean, with the complex power and inheritance of this term and with its various implicit projections what of human identity is in relation to the non-human, with ideas of the wild, of nature as refuge or nature as resource, nature as the space of the outcast, of sin and perversity, nature as a space of metamorphosis or redemption. (6)

Besides being "engaged provocatively" with literary analysis, ecocriticism in

Clark's definition, should be pertinent to other fields of relevant knowledge (8).

The interdisciplinarity of ecocriticism, in practice, embraces ecology as a theory that has transcended earlier cultural theories by infusing nature, society, and politics in a larger, more comprehensive frame of knowledge (Brooker 83-84). On these terms, an ecocritical analysis of literary texts can explicitly adopt a "green," "moral," and "political" disposition that surmounts the historic exposition of the dual relationship between the human and the natural by offering a "critical analysis of the term 'human' itself" (Lidström and Gerrard 3; 5). It is from this holistic perception of man's position in and relation to his biotic environment that ecocriticism developed and assimilated other facets of the human experience.

Annus Mirabilis and the Possibility for an Ecocritical Debate:

Annus Mirabilis allows of different readings. Dryden describes it as a historical poem, rather than an epic, despite the grandeur of the described events ("An Account of the Ensuing Poem" 26). Following Richard Bradford's description of poetry written from the 1660s to the 1740s, *Annus Mirabilis* falls into the category of "the public poem" as an example of "the so-called 'poem on affairs of state" (66-67). Others regard it as "a tale of military and commercial conquest" (Burke 313), or such "an eloquent panegyric to trade," and "a noble proclamation" of London's prospects (Hooker 67). There is no direct reference to the poet embarking on the man-nature relationship as an ecological motif. However, Helen M. Burke in "Annus Mirabilis and the Ideology of the New Science" (1990) and Katsuhiro Engetsu, too, in "The Poetics of Natural History in 'Annus Mirabilis,'" have tackled Dryden's concept of nature from the 18th century particular stance on science and nature.

Annus Mirabilis in Helen M. Burke's "Annus Mirabilis and the Ideology of the New Science" (1990), has attempted a "reconciliation of conflicting natural philosophies" by using "poetic figures" instead of "expository persuasion" to highlight war and fire as "two different paradigms" of man's relation to nature that assert "the irreducibility of nature" and "the limitations" of humanity in relation to "the exterior animated world" (309). In addition to recovering "a repressed scientific paradigm," the fire narrative also

recovers "a repressed theological and social paradigm" (310). Burke's reading of the poem locates "the association between science, military undertaking, and monarchy" and represents Charles as "the one who controls reality through what he sees, through his theory" (315).

Katsuhiro Engetsu's "The Poetics of Natural History in 'Annus Mirabilis,'" indicates that Dryden adopted the classifying method of natural history to contain the great but "broken" events of 1666, namely "the Four Days Battle in June, the St. James Day Battle in July, and the Great Fire of London in September," into the unifying framework of his heroic poem (245). The dedication of the second section of the long poem to "the urban disaster" of the great fire has "mechanically define[d]" the first half of the poem as the naval, or water section (246). Grounded in natural history, Dryden's classifying methodology not only gave his argument a sort of textual unity, but also invented nature "as the single origin in reference to which all the varieties with their specific qualities are constantly contained in the growing system" (246).

Nature in Burke's account of the 'natural philosophy' of *Annus Mirabilis* is "recalcitrant" (329). That is, it is defiant, difficult to operate or manage, and, thus, resistible to treatment. As such, it complies with Glen A. Love's ecocritical concept of nature as an entity that "reveals adaptive strategies far more complex than any human mind could devise" (231). Meanwhile, Engetsu's annotation of the methodology of natural history in *Annus Mirabilis* not only "naturalizes the brokenness" of the poem's 1666 chronological survey of disconnected but great actions (246), but also arouses the curiosities of ecocritical readers to this characteristic display of natural elements.

Annus Mirabilis applies to Lidström and Gerrard's description of the "environmental poem," as "grapple[s] with" the changing relationship between the human society and the natural environment (37). Dryden's detailed account of the enormous fire is ecological because it asserts the interrelatedness of the human and the non-human elements of the city, underlines nature's wild and incompatible forces, and, eventually, challenges the hype of anthropocentric exceptionality "that society is complex while nature is simple" (Love 230). Dryden's evident animation of natural forces in

the fire section of the poem exposes the workings of ecology in the London natural landscape and makes the ecocritical reading of *Annus Mirabilis* unavoidable.

Figurative Ecology in *Annus Mirabilis*:

Ecocriticism assumes that "all entities in the great web of nature deserve recognition and a voice" (Mcdowell 372). For the ecocriticism reader, the nature of *nature* is controversially diverse. Whether it is a "silent" player (Manes 15), or "pathetically willing" (Turner 45), nature "reveals adaptive strategies far more complex than any human mind could devise" (Love 231). Accordingly, *eco*poets can make nature anything "but *not neutral*" (Evernden 100). They have "to *make* it perform," because "like any performer, the environment could be cast in a multiplicity of roles, toward divergent ends" (Mazel 138). Nature performs in every possible way; it is consciously "out there" and "the encounter" is due (Maran 455). In *Annus Mirabilis*, the encounter with nature is not a pastoral retreat to "a green world, to which sophisticated urbanites withdraw in search of the lessons of simplicity which only nature can teach" (Love 231). Instead, the encounter exposes a grim world, a primordial power that undermines the legend of anthropocentric superiority or priority. Every scene, symbol, and image in the poem foreground the presence of nature as a viciously willing *performer*. Indeed, it is the unpleasant encounter with the fire that has enticed the poet to "overturn" and thus "restructure" established dichotomies of man and nature, weak and powerful, which in SueEllen Campbell's argument, represent the core of ecological literature (127).

The ecological interpretation of literature, according to Timo Maran's reading of the man-nature interaction or interrelation, should look for "the established semiotic connections" and "meaning-relations" that dominate the existence of mankind and biotic nature (456; 466). In *Annus Mirabilis*, a strong, meaningful connection between the human and the non-human appears in the recurrent fire-water tropes that juxtapose these cosmic elements to give strong visual imagery and foreground the ecological interpretation. Fire-water tropes exceeds the limitations of natural philosophy and the methodology of natural history as detected by Burke and Engetsu, respectively. These paradoxical tropes rearrange the established binarism of human and biotic

natures on new terms. A closer ecological reading of the figurative structure of the fire section of *Annus Mirabilis* asserts Dryden's "ecological literacy" (Howarth 69). His "ecoconsciousness" (Love 230) is established in two stages:

- ***Stage one—A Willingly Animated Nature:***
  The dramatic presence of nature, as a willingly animated entity, is semiotically embedded in paradoxical fire-water tropes that give way to evidently ecological ends.

- ***Stage two—The Metamorphosis of the Phoenix:***
  The London landscape perfectly boosts the prospects of biotic nature. Humbly submitted to nature's primordial forces, the city reemerges as a mythological phoenix that rises from its own ashes a better version than its older self. The resurrection, a genuine product of the inevitable man-nature encounter, eventually leads to the restoration of ecological equilibrium.

Tropes of a Willingly Animated Nature:

The ecological dilemma in *Annus Mirabilis* is embedded in the adjacency of the contradictory natural forces of fire and water in recurrent tropes (basically, metaphors) that dramatically foreground the tyranny of biotic nature and the vulnerability of mankind. Metaphors imply transference, multiple senses and multiple meanings or interpretations (Leech 150; Glucksberg 3; Picken 59). Dryden's transference of the destructive power of fire to the opposing setting of massive water tides is stunning. To see the likeliness of or the ground of the metaphor, in this paradoxical trope requires an imagination that is strong enough to defy the ordinary modes of reference (Snævarr 62). The juxtaposition of words that convey self-contradicting information in adjacent lines is considered linguistically a sort of "absurdity" or "semantic oddity" (Leech 132). Reading the absurdity of the fire-water trope from Viktor Shklovsky's perspective in "Art as Technique," the adjacency of the two 'defamiliarized' parts of this self-contradictory image destroys the monotony resulting from the conventional or 'automatized' perception of the immensity of the fire (15-18). Yet, artistically, this deviation from the habitual collocation of the two words, fire and water, shakes readers' perception and calls for second thoughts.

Annus Mirabilis presents the Great Fire of London as one of God's

tremendous "threatenings" to the ungrateful crowds, a retaliation for the masses' sinful disobedience of their monarch (st. 270). For four days, the blaze had viciously swept the narrow lanes of the old city like a "mighty squadron," while other forces of nature were collaborating to make the situation worse (st. 236). A mighty side wind joined forces with that "marching foe" and hastened the flames, not only through the narrow lanes and open streets, but also past the London Tower towards temples and palaces, more specifically towards "the imperial palace" (st.237). Throughout, the flames of fire assume more than one *earthly* shape which all assert the immensity of horrifying disaster. Examples include the "seeds of fire" (st. 217), "the infant monster" (st. 218), "some rich or mighty murderer" (st. 219), a long-necked, wide-winged dragon (st. 233-234), and a many-headed serpent (st. 249). Though intimidating, all such tropes are not absurd; they are still conceivable. Only one trope is the most absurd of all, and the most significant, too, in ecological terms: "The curling billows roll their restless tide: / In parties now they straggle up and down, / As armies, unoppos'd, for prey divide" (st. 235)

The Great Fire had "curling billows" "roll[ing] their restless tide" to "every nobler portion of the town" (st. 235). Although the actual presence of the fire is missed in the adjacency of the metaphoric lines, the absurdity of the comparison in never missed. In addition to the presumed power suggested by the plurality of the "billows" and the "tides" and the kinesthetic imagery in "curling," "roll," and "restless," the shock resulting from the absurd contradiction between the tenor of the metaphor (i.e., the flames) and the vehicle (i.e., the rising tides) intensifies the ground of the trope (i.e., the sharp contrast between the overwhelming power of the fire and the helplessness of its victims). The shock is doubled by the extended metaphor which describes these same flames/waves as "unopposed" "armies" ready to crush their helpless "prey." That both fire and water are inspirited, conscious and alive is enough to make biotic nature an "animistic," "voluble subject" rather than "a symbolic presence" or "a mute object"—the very core of ecology (Manes 17).

The fiery/watery juxtaposition extends also to animate and revitalizes other parts of the London natural scene, the Thames included. Not only is the river personified, but it is also used as a token of natural conformity, sociopolitical stability, and ecological hygiene. Like "the curling billows," it

is inspirited and alive, not as a fetish or object of irrational reverence as in the primitively animistic Native American culture, for example, but as a lively organ that belongs to the larger, much wiser, and more dominant London ecosystem. The Thames was equally subdued by the fire. The "hostile breath" of the Belgian gusts blew dry rafters of burnt homes and ships and scorching stones overall to the riverbed (st. 231). At once, the river's ecosystem was at odds with the "ignoble crowds": "The waken'd tides began a gain to roar, / And wond'ring fish in shining waters gaze" (st. 231). The contrast between the roaring waves that have just woken from their usual slumber and the bewildered fish seeing their habitat turned upside down makes the Thames a precursor of ecological hygiene, a token of biotic nature before and after the crisis:

> Old Father Thames rais'd up his reverend head,
> But fear'd the fate of Simois would return:
> Deep in his ooze he sought his sedgy bed,
> And shrunk his waters back into his urn. (st. 232)

The holiness of the river as indicated by "Old Father" and "reverend head" fails to save the city, let alone its dwelling creatures, for one good reason: Nature was against the Londoners because they were against themselves, and the Thames was an inseparable part of nature.

The image of the blasted river undermines any harmony in man-nature ecological relations. The "reverend" river which is supposed to be a sacred source of life providing humans with water and food has become a source of death: an urn, as Dryden intelligently depicts it. Right now, the urn is full of ashes, ready for the cremation of the old peasant London. Though "reverend," the scared river feared to have the same fate of *Simois,* the Greek god of river who let the Trojans down. Old Father Thames knew that he was supposed to save the city, but he could not because he was under deep hypnosis. The wakened tides and the wondering fish are now gone. Like Simois, Old Thames fails the Londoners not only as a provider of life, but also as a possible extinguisher. There is only the humble deposit of mud, slime, or shells on the river's "sedgy" bottom. As Old Father Thames huddles and shrinks its waters back to its urn, people know that they are on their own.

Considering that the crisis of the city was that of a conflagration rather

than of famine, Dryden certainly interprets the huddling of the river, not as a simple process of reflux, but as an ecological symptom asserting that everything in the London ecosystem was at odds with the mutant and ignoble crowds. Under these circumstances, the Old Father Thames becomes "an urn," a reservoir of the last remains of life, and emblem of future resurrection.

- **Stage 2: The Metamorphosis of the Phoenix**

In the battle part of *Annus Mirabilis,* Dryden regards the rebuilding of the leading ship of the English fleet, named "The goodly London," as a resurrection. The new ship has become "(The phoenix daughter of the vanish'd old). / Like a rich bride does to the ocean swim" (st. 151). On similar grounds, the post-fire London is the phoenix daughter of the burned one. From ashes it is reborn anew:

> Yet, London, empress of the northern clime,
> By an high fate thou greatly didst expire;
> Great as the world's, which, at the death of time
> Must fall, and rise a nobler frame by fire! (st. 212)

The same motif of substantial metamorphosis explicitly features in Dryden's memorable letter "To the Metropolis of Great Britain": "You are now a phoenix in her ashes, and, as far as humanity can approach, a great emblem of the suffering Deity" (24). The poem, in Dryden's own words, is not as much a "history" of the city's "destruction" as it is "a prophecy" of its "restoration" (24).

Annus Mirabilis's course of action interweaves ecological destruction because of the fire and the prophetic restoration of Monarchy and the grandeur of the metropolis afterwards. Politically as well as ecologically, London was profaned. That the fire has started in the mean (not opulent) buildings inhabited by mean people (for, "ignoble" refers to mean immoral common people) is not a coincidence. Though the cheap wooden houses covered with tar can feed the smallest spark and turn it into a fiery storm, it was not the nature of the dwellings as much as it was the nature of the dwellers themselves that fed the blast. The ignoble crowds, as suggested by the poet's undertone, may have shown some signs of disobedience to their monarch to deserve this

purging punishment. Nature itself, as the poem unfolds, supports the blessed reign of "the auspicious king" (st. 20), but these ignoble crowds do not. Ecologically, the metropolis did "half in rubbish lie" (st. 280). After the purge, it turned into a "redeemed ground" (st. 283).

The ecological resurrection in Dryden's view is inseparable from the political acceptance of the Stuart Monarch as a representative of God's will on earth. The intertwining of both routes of survival makes the extinguishment of wildfire and ecological well-being conditionally dependent on the regal power rather than on the absolute and divine resources bestowed by the Creator. Dryden's statement is that if the renowned London is the daughter phoenix, Charles is the primary agent of that metamorphosis. Thanks to Charles's pious prayers, God eventually "cast a pitying eye" on the destroyed city and stops the "eager flames" (st. 280). Accordingly, a "hollow crystal pyramid" of "firmamental water" fell like "a broad extinguisher" and "hoods the flames to their quarry" (st. 281). In response to that heavenly extinguisher, biotic nature reverses its course.

At the beginning of the crisis, the city's ecosystem was subdued by the uncontrollable fire and Old Father Thames was hypnotized and forced to sleep. Now, thanks to the hoods of firmamental waters, "the vestal fire" (st. 257) has given place to a bunch of "vanquish'd fires" that "sink into a sleep" (st. 282). Although Dryden infuses the crucial moment of the "natural change" with his flattery of the benevolent King, the transformation of London from "this mourning land" (st. 265) into "his redeemed ground" (st. 283) is stunning. The incessant fire eventually gives way to warm hearths: "Each household genius shows again his face, / And from the hearths the little Lares creep" (st. 282). Considering that Lares in Roman mythology is the guardian of hearths and households, Dryden's delineation of the Roman deity as a little child creeping on London's floors alludes to the hope inspired by the resurrected daughter phoenix. To aid the phoenix in its resurrection, the benevolent Lares and other heroic figures like the winged cherub, Jove, Cyrus, Vesta, Simois, and Tagus, join forces against the fiendish army of the "Hydra-like" fire (st. 249), its "dire night-hags" (st. 248), and the "ghosts of traitors" (st. 223).

Yet, aside from the domesticity of London's transformed ecology implied by the rehabilitated hearths, the entire ecological system is absolutely

meant to reverse the earlier collapse. As "sharp frosts" give place to "mild rain, "the tender blade peeps up to birth, / And straight the green fields laugh with promised grain" (st. 284). The sociopolitical/ecological resurrection brings about spiritual resurrection as well. The "mourning" city is transformed into a merry one. The "spreading gladness grew / In every heart which fear had froze before"; and the streets are filled with "less grief" and "so much joy" (st. 285). The persistence of such merriment, and consequently, the success of the resurrection, are conditionally bound to the persistence of the Stuart King on the English throne. Since he was "anointed" by God (st. 286), he is the only one who can guarantee the rise of the nobler London from its ashes:

> But so may he live long, that town to sway,
> Which by his auspice they will nobler make,
> As he will hatch their ashes by his stay,
> And not their humble ruins now forsake. (st. 288)

Out of the "humble ruins" of the burned city, a nobler version will hatch from the ashes. Such is the phoenix, the princess that will be far nobler than the old peasant girl; and such will be the purged Londoners who have learned the lesson and "have not lost their loyalty by fire; / Nor is their courage or their wealth so low" **(**st. 289).

Under the auspices of Charles, Dryden argues, London would be as great as Cyrus's great Persian Empire. Like the young Persian prince, Charles can rebuild the city with matchless vigor:

> Not with more constancy the Jews of old,
> By Cyrus from rewarded exile sent,
> Their royal city did in dust behold,
> Or with more vigour to rebuild it went. (st. 290)

Although these lines put Dryden into the question of being one of the "political puppets and hirelings" of his age (Bradford 67), his argument is still acceptable so far as it links ecological equilibrium to the preservation of social peace and political stability. Citing Cyrus as an example of a successful *restored* ruler, Dryden is in fact establishing a strong cord between the Restoration of Charles and the Resurrection of London, and the metamorphosis of the entire nation as a result.

For Dryden, the Stuart Monarch was not only braver than the Persian Cyrus, but also, he was as promising as Jove, the chief Roman god of light, of the sky and weather, and of the state and its welfare and its laws. Charles was meant to rule the new phoenix. Now, the ignoble crowds have got the lesson. Radical social order suggested by the crowd's dissatisfaction with Charles's policies have gained them nothing but a world turned upside down. Now the "utmost malice of their stars [the Londoners'] is past" (st. 291), the renewed ecological scene becomes stunning:

> Now frequent trines the happier lights among,
> And high-raised Jove, from his dark prison freed,
> Those weights took off that on his planet hung,
> Will gloriously the new-laid work succeed. **(**st. 292)

Now, the "Hydra-like" fire gradually recedes (st. 249); and, instead, the prisoned Jove is freed from his dark prison. The multifarious, uncontainable evil evoked by Hydra, the many-headed serpent in Greek mythology, gives way to an alchemic flame that impressively transforms the city and promises it with a completely new fate:

> Methinks already from this chemic flame,
> I see a city of more precious mould:
> Rich as the town which gives the Indies name,
> With silver paved, and all divine with gold.
>
> Already labouring with a mighty fate,
> She shakes the rubbish from her mounting brow,
> And seems to have renew'd her charter's date,
> Which Heaven will to the death of time allow. (st. 293-294)

The "labouring" of the old city indicates the process of metamorphosis, while the "mounting" (or gradually increasing) brow emphasizes the gradual realization of the scene of the livelier product:

> More great than human now, and more august [i.e., majestic],
> Now deified she from her fires does rise:
> Her widening streets on new foundations trust,
> And opening into larger parts she flies. (st. 295)

The resurrected city is a deity, a sacred entity empowered by God's "absolute decree" (st. 269,). Here the reconstruction is more mythical and metaphorical than architectural. Yet, the contrastive metaphorical metamorphosis assumes another dimension that is not completely free from Dryden's usual cynicism:

> Before, she like some shepherdess did show,
> Who sat to bathe her by a river's side;
> Not answering to her fame, but rude and low,
> Nor taught the beauteous arts of modern pride.
>
> Now, like a maiden queen, she will behold,
> From her high turrets, hourly suitors come;
> The East with incense, and the West with gold,
> Will stand, like suppliants, to receive her doom! [judgment or decision] (st. 296-297)

Metaphorically, the phoenix symbolizes renewal, resurrection, and exceptionality. The change from the rude and low shepherdess bathing by the river's side into the princess looking down on suitors from her high towers (the high turrets), though expressive of the metamorphosis, excludes everything that is low and rude from the prosperous resurrected city. The alchemic flame has borne fruit indeed, for the rude shepherdess has metamorphosed into a maiden queen hourly suited by the whole world. But that was not all.

Not only architecturally but also ecologically the city has been transformed. River Thames is an impressive token of the massive change. Like Jove, River Thames is set free from its sedgy urn. No longer is he the disappointing Simois. The deep ooze has given way to a sweeping flood that winds throughout the land in glee:

> The silver Thames, her own domestic flood,
> Shall bear her vessels like a sweeping train;
> And often wind, as of his mistress proud,
> With longing eyes to meet her face again. (st. 298)

Out of his sedgy urn, Old Father Thames has risen from the ashes a new river. So full of life, the silver Thames is brimming with water that it can proudly carry countless ships. As such, the resurrected river has become a rival to

famous mighty rivers:

> The wealthy Tagus, and the wealthier Rhine,
> The glory of their towns no more shall boast;
> And Seine, that would with Belgian rivers join,
> Shall find her lustre stain'd, and traffic lost. (st. 299)

The stark contrast between the whining river before the metamorphosis, and the winding river after it is impressive. Though the river fails to save the city, it is an emblem of ecological resurrection. The vessels can be more than ships moving lightly on lustrous waves; they are also the winding blood streams that carry life throughout the phoenix's resurrected body. Now Old Father Thames can proudly raise his "reverend head" (st. 232).

Conclusion:

Dryden's account of the Great Fire of London has efficiently manipulated and animated elements of nature to assert God's cosmic punishment of London's ignoble crowds for their political mutiny of the auspices of their king. Although the lines bear obvious mythological emblems of Greek deities, the ecological overtones of the poet's poetic/political argument cannot be missed. The fire is an ecological means of natural and social purification; it punishes the unfit for their disloyalty and molds the purified society into a better version of itself. The intricate intertwining of ecological and political motifs suggests that Dryden's ecology in *Annus Mirabilis* advocates a hierarchal ecosystem that places monarch on top of the human community, and biotic (non-human) nature on top of both. This hierarchal mode of dependence puts the king always as a priority, as a link to Heaven, and thus as the only ostensible means to relate to biotic nature. Meanwhile, humans are interdependent, rather than interrelated.

Intellectually and metaphorically, Dryden has introduced his ecological literacy in the fire section of *Annus Mirabilis*. Intellectually, Dryden has promoted the idea of the institutionalized, purposive society. It is institutionalized, as far as it averts the chaos of civil war and dissent; and it is purposive, because it aligns with the crown in the legitimate attempt to resume the English hegemony, and thus equilibrium, inside and outside. The political strain adopted by Dryden as one of the main crown orators infuses hierarchy with the maintenance of ecology. Intellectually, also, Dryden advocates the

ecological premise that man is not master. Even Charles has his share of the ordeal; his subservience to God and to the disaster, represented by his sincere prayers and tearful agony, could break the chain of ecological collapse.

That Dryden has deliberately disturbed common linguistic and perceptive norms by representing the flames of fire as water tides actually underscores the primordial paradigm of ecological consciousness that many ecocritics like Thomas Claviez, Christopher Manes, and Glen A. Love have underlined. Nature is vital and unavoidable, and its dramatic presence is semiotically coded. Only an insightful mind can grasp its process and achieve its results. The paradoxical manipulation of fire-water tropes significantly foreshadows the paradoxical existence of the human and the natural.

The optimum of Dryden's ecological consciousness is represented by his intricate delineation of River Thames as an index, or a signifier, of political and ecological equilibrium. The Thames played a vital ecological role, by measuring both the immensity of ecological deterioration and the subsequent renewal its welfare. The resurrection of the city itself and its metaphoric metamorphosis from a poor peasant girl to the noble princess is a token of the revival of the London ecosystem as marked by its historic river. The urn of ashes is miraculously transformed into a flowing vessel of life. Although Dryden's ecological insights establish nature as a supreme, rather than, a simple entity which is inspirited, willing, and cunning, they also underline the inevitable dependencies between mankind and the natural environment.

Dryden's figurative description of the Great Fire asserts that the human and the non-human are not always complementary; sometimes**,** humans are under the control of the non-human**.** Since the idea of *abuse*—man's abuse of natural resources—is reiterated in naturalist, environmental and ecological discourse, the idea of abuse here is reversed: it is nature in its most primal and most destructive form that abuses man's world and invades his safe circle. The poet suggests that to overcome the ecological crisis requires a collaboration of all elements of the society to face, tame, and control an angry nature, which once strikes, does not yield so easily. The extinction of fire required total collaboration of all social classes, admission of the supremacy of nature (never underestimate the power of the opposing party), and a deep spiritual resurrection of man-divine relationships.

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