



THE POSTECOLOGICAL WORLD OF JOHN BURNSIDE: DARK GREEN NATURE, POLLUTION, AND ECO-GRIEF IN *GLISTER*

JOHN BURNSIDE'İN EKOLOJİSONRASI DÜNYASI: *GLISTER* ROMANINDA KARANLIK YEŞİL DOĞA, KİRLİLİK VE ÇEVRESEL KEDER

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Abstract

This article examines John Burnside's *Glister* (2008) as a novel of dark ecology, expounding the changing relationship between humans and nature, with a particular focus on the environmental and bodily contamination and its effects on social and moral structures of everyday life in a Scottish town. In charting the strange transformations of the Anthropocene, the new geological epoch where humans have become a geologic force changing planetary ecosystems, the article situates *Glister* with respect to today's posthuman ecocritical debates around toxicity and dark ecologies introduced by Timothy Morton and Paul Kingsnorth. Burnside aligns two versions of dark ecology predicated on the repudiation of green ecology, conjuring up a "dark green" ecological vision in which humans are fundamentally enmeshed in and interdependent with the more-than-human world, no matter how dark and horrifying this coexistence becomes. In doing so, it shows how Burnside anticipates a "postecological" reality by suggesting a new definition of nature in which the environment becomes both green and dark as well as real and spectral. The study develops this argument through a discussion of Morton's conceptual tools, such as "mesh" and "strange stranger," highlighting the novel's emphasis on radical interconnection and liminality between human and extra-human entities. Pointing out that it is impossible to run away from the toxic predicament befalling humans alongside other bodily natures in this strange coexistence, Burnside intensifies his questioning of dark green nature, evoking an eco-grief not just for human loss, but for the human disenchantment of ecological reality.

Öz

Bu makale, çevresel ve bedensel kirlenmeyi ve bu kirlenmenin bir İskoç kasabasında günlük yaşamın sosyal ve ahlaki yapılarına etkilerini odak noktasına alır; insanlar ve doğa arasındaki değişen ilişkiyi açıklayarak John Burnside'in *Glister* (2008) adlı romanını karanlık ekolojinin bir romanı olarak inceler. İnsanların gezegendeki ekosistemleri değiştiren jeolojik bir güç olduğu yeni jeolojik çağ Antroposen'in gözlerimizin önüne serdiği garip değişimlerin izini sürerken bu makale, Timothy Morton ve Paul Kingsnorth'un ortaya çıkardıkları karanlık ekolojiler ve kirlilik ile ilgili günümüz insansonrası ekoeleştirel tartışmalar bağlamına *Glister* romanını koymaktadır. Burnside, yeşil ekolojinin reddine dayanan karanlık ekolojinin iki farklı versiyonunu aynı hizaya getirir; insan ve insan-dışı dünyanın birlikte varoluşu karanlık ve korkutucu olursa da insanların, insandan öte dünyayla temel olarak ağ gibi sarılı ve birbirine bağlı olduğu "karanlık yeşil" bir ekolojik vizyon ortaya koyar. Böylece bu çalışma, Burnside'in çevrenin gerçek ve spektral olmasının yanı sıra hem yeşil hem de karanlık olduğu yeni bir doğa tanımı öne sürerek nasıl bir "ekolojisonrası" gerçekliği öngördüğünü göstermektedir. Öte yandan çalışma, romanın vurguladığı insan ve insan-dışı varlıklar arasındaki eşikliliğin ve radikal olarak birbirine bağlı olmanın altını çizerek "ekolojik ağ örgüsü" ile "yabansı yabancı" gibi Morton'un kavramsal araçlarının tartışmasıyla Burnside'in savını geliştirmektedir. Garip varoluştaki diğer bedensel doğaların yanı sıra insanların başına gelen toksik beladan kaçışın imkansız olduğunu belirten Burnside, sadece insan kaybı için değil, insanın ekolojik gerçeklikten kopuşu için de ekolojik bir keder uyandırarak karanlık yeşil doğayı sorgulamasını derinleştirir.

Introduction: Dark Ecologies

The emerging realities of climate change, escalating pollution and toxicity woven materially into the fabric of all life forms, and globally happening ecocatastrophes today, play a distinctive role in the twenty-first-century British novel, *Glister*. Reworked as a thematic thread, environmental toxicity is a dynamic entity within material and imaginary landscapes, steering the established

conventions of nature as stable and untouched in a new direction. One can find this direction in the imaginary reconstructions of lethal zones and bleached landscapes in the econarratives of John Burnside. Deploying pollution as a literary trope for the blurring of boundaries between nature and society, spirit and matter, the Scottish author John Burnside portrays a disenchanted world of toxicity in *Glister*, exploring how toxic intrusion into human and nonhuman bodies as well as places changes our relationships with nature: he reconstructs a dark realm in which people and the community physically and morally fall apart. In this sense, the novel presents a thoroughly dark ecological vision in which nature becomes the ultimate other, dangerous and inimical to humanity; thus this article examines *Glister* as an exemplary novel of “dark ecology.” As a contextualizing frame for *Glister*, the study deploys the term “dark ecology” introduced by both Timothy Morton and Paul Kingsnorth to draw attention to the present ecological condition marked by global pollution. Despite their different approaches to the concept of nature, both scholars claim that nature no longer provides relief and solace from negativity; instead, due to the complex imbrication of the social and natural environments on a global scale, nature has become dark, indeterminate, and dangerous, rendering all life vulnerable to ecological disasters. Therefore, Morton and Kingsnorth suggest, we need to establish a new framework for describing the ecocide with which human beings are nowadays confronted.

Responding to the ecological plight in their ecophilosophies, Morton and Kingsnorth argue that green ecology remains inadequate in explaining today’s ecological predicament, because, as Morton puts it, here “[e]xcluding pollution is part of performing Nature as pristine, wild, immediate, and pure” (“Queer Ecology” 274). Can we ever find a remote place not infiltrated by pollution produced by socio-cultural activities and practices? According to Morton and Kingsnorth, wild nature as such does not exist. Therefore, pollution is the main factor in the formation of dark ecology. Paying special attention to the dark side of the inextricability of nature and culture, Morton and Kingsnorth deconstruct the very idea of green nature today, resulting in what they call “dark ecology.” Dark ecology would never affirm the existence of a pristine wilderness set apart from humans, nor does it yearn for it. Instead, dark ecological reality embraces, in Morton’s words, “the ‘goth’ assertion of the contingent and necessarily queer idea that we want to stay with a dying world” (*Ecology* 185), rather than the green ecological assertion of a “natural” earth as “sunny, straightforward, ableist, holistic, hearty, and ‘healthy’” (*The Ecological Thought* 16). In a radical move, both Morton and Kingsnorth

reconceptualize ecology, while also claiming that there never really is any natural landscape in the face of climate change and global pollution.

In his *Confessions of a Recovering Environmentalist and Other Essays* (2017), Paul Kingsnorth discusses the ways that industrialization damaged humanity's relations to nature, and what he sees happening is the disappearance of nature that generates life:

Our civilization is beginning to break down. We are at the start of an unfolding economic and social collapse which may take decades or centuries to play out—and which is playing out against the background of a planetary ecocide that nobody seems able to prevent. We are not gods, and our machines will not get us off this hook, however clever they are and however much we would like to believe it. (142).

Kingsnorth sounds pessimistic, declaring an unavoidable ecocollapse in the future as the result of industrial progress and technological advancement, which is the dawn of dark ecology, as he calls it. The dark ecological perspective is his response to the planetary ecocide brought about by capitalism that, he argues, has only produced ecological devastation. Together with Dougald Hine, Kingsnorth published a manifesto called "*Uncivilisation*" for the Dark Mountain Project in 2009, describing dark ecology as "*an underlying darkness at the root of everything we have built*" (262) with the aim to disavow "*humanity's delusions of difference, of its separation from and superiority to the living world which surrounds it*" (266). This perspective reflects a dark life in the twenty-first century, since the possibility of establishing a harmonious connection between human beings and the environment is almost lost. In this project, however, nature is presented as "*something thoroughly alive and intimately interwoven with human existence*" (162-163) - a network ecology in which one can find beauty and ugliness, fear and happiness, terror and awe. In Kingsnorth's words:

what I call "nature" (an imperfect word, but I can never seem to find a better one) is really just another word for life; an ever-turning wheel of blood and shit and death and rebirth. Nature is fatal as often as it is beautiful, and sometimes it is both at once. But for me, that's the point: it is the fear and the violence inherent in wild nature, as much as the beauty and the peace, that inspires in me the impulses which religions ask me to direct towards their human-shaped gods: humility, a sense of smallness, sometimes a fear,

usually a desire to be part of something bigger than me and my kind.

To lose myself; to lose my Self. (162).

Notwithstanding the distinctive view of nature with its creative-destructive processes within the network of the human and nonhuman realms, Kingsnorth, influenced by Buddhism, draws attention to a vital, liminal collective unity, along with spiritual and sacred aspects of nature about which nobody cares in consumer societies. As he puts it, “*nature is somehow sacred, is widely held, crosses cultural and national boundaries, and is a potentially powerful defence against the intellectual assaults of the New Gods*” (177). Referring to premodern notions of nature, Kingsnorth regards nature as a “*spiritual*” community of which human beings become part, for once we “*lived in harmony with the natural world,*” he writes, “*until the first grain seed was cultivated, after which we slid into a future of hierarchy, control and ecological destruction*” (37). Yet, the consumerist society lacks such a vision, as the ecological collapse leaves behind a dark ecology, creating a sense of “*eco-lament,*” making us weep for the fact that pristine nature has disappeared. In noting that the “*nature of nature has always been change, which means that death – and rebirth – will always be with us, and that rebirth may take forms we do not recognise and did not expect*” (222), Kingsnorth claims: “*[y]ou are part of this process, and so am I, and this time around we are the cause of it too. The future offers chaos, uncertainty, loss*” (222). Dark ecology, thus, is an environmental process containing chaos, uncertainty, and loss. It configures a dark life for humans and other beings. As such, dark ecology means an environmental melancholy, an “*eco-grief*” for the loss of regenerative nature: “*I looked around me, at the diminishing natural beauty and its accelerating destruction, and I despaired*” (216). Kingsnorth clearly feels despair at the present state of the planet, but he also states that you need to “*acknowledge the reality of the loss, and the pain it causes*” (98). And as he continues, you need to stop “*pretending that the loss isn’t real, or that it will all go back to how it was. Grieving is the starting point for being able to move on and through, and to begin to rebuild yourself again*” (98). In other words, he argues that if that natural loss is culturally recognised and valued through grieving, our anthropocentric vision can be changed. But this view is not too convincing for many ecocritics. Catrina Mortimer-Sandilands, for instance, poses an important question in “*Melancholy Natures, Queer Ecologies*”: “*how does one mourn in the midst of a culture that finds it almost impossible to recognize the value of what has been lost?*” (333). As an answer to this question, Kingsnorth would state that whether one denies or acknowledges that loss, dark ecology surrounding humans

will make people recognize how ecosystems are deteriorating, and then, this predicament may pave the way for an environmental affection. Kingsnorth's vision, as Deirdre d'Albertis observes in "Dark Nature," underlines a "*mourning and grief not so much for the planet itself (which will endure) but for humanity's doomed relationship to a nature it both venerates and desecrates without respite*" (137). In Kingsnorth's perspective, even if nature is able to barely survive any ecocollapse, it is necessary to move on through grief. So, Kingsnorth discusses the recognition of vulnerability, suffering, and mortality conferred onto not only humans but also nonhumans. Not certain but all lives are grievable in the dark ecological vision.

In a similar vein, Timothy Morton, too, predicates his vision of dark ecology on a "*melancholic ethics*" (*Ecology without Nature...* 186), which he defines as pursuing a negative, dark desire that is always already located in ecology. Similar to Kingsnorth's vision, Morton propounds a dark ecological world in which the "*ecological crisis makes us aware of how interdependent everything is*" (*The Ecological Thought* 30). Morton's ecological vision implies that nothing is holistic outside its relations.¹ Yet, by no means does he celebrate this situation. Rather, he regards it in negative terms, suggesting that "*everything is interconnected. And it sucks*" (*The Ecological Thought* 33). Thus, Morton's ecological thought contains "*negativity and irony, ugliness and horror*" (*Ecological* 17), as well as "*uncertainty*" and the "*anti-ecological*" (*The Ecological Thought* 16, 59). The ecological reality in the twenty-first century, in this sense, is indeterminate, encompassing ugly chemical plants, nuclear bombs, horror and terror that ecocatastrophes have inflicted upon humans and nonhumans. Dark ecology, therefore, illustrates how humans and nonhumans are fundamentally enmeshed in and negatively interdependent with one another with no boundaries between nature and culture. As Morton clarifies in *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence* (2016), ecological reality requires an "*awareness that at first has the characteristics of tragic melancholy and negativity, concerning inextricable coexistence with a host of entities that surround and penetrate us, but which evolves paradoxically into an anarchic, comedic sense of coexistence*" (160). Recognizing this coexistence that capitalist societies ignore, provides, according to Morton, a basis for a tragic melancholy, an eco-grief underlying the precariousness of human beings. This kind of coexistence indicates

¹ In *The Ecological Thought* (2010), Morton argues that the ecological thought does not at all support a holistic form of nature: "*The ecological thought isn't about a superorganism. Holism maintains that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. 'Nature' tends to be holistic. Unlike Nature, what the ecological thought is thinking isn't more than the sum of its parts*" (35).

a dark ecological enmeshment in which humans interact with nonhumans in chaotic and anarchic ways. The darkness in this enmeshment comes from what he terms “*the strange stranger*” in “*the mesh*” (*The Ecological Thought* 80, 8).

Morton’s conceptual tools, “*the mesh*” and “*the strange stranger*,” in his dark ecological project are quite important to understand his formulation of dark ecology. He argues for an ecological mesh rife with familiar and strange beings, an open, vast, and incoherent whole that is by no means harmonious but uncanny and destructive. In this mesh, strange strangers are not only humans and nonhumans, but also imaginary entities, including ghosts, vampires, and giants. These strangers are totally strange to themselves, to each other but in a way interrelated with one another. In other words, they are uncannily coexistent in the mesh. These real and unreal creatures might also cause holes, gaps, and breaches in the mesh of dark ecology. In *The Ecological Thought*, Morton describes dark ecology as “*a vast, sprawling mesh of interconnection without a definite center or edge. It is radical intimacy, coexistence with other beings, sentient and otherwise*” (8). This is a radical “*interconnectedness of all living and non-living things*” (*The Ecological Thought* 28), which, as a main vector of the mesh, often creates difference and separateness between human and nonhuman beings: “*Interconnection implies separateness and difference. There would be no mesh if there were no strange strangers. The mesh isn’t a background against which the strange stranger appears. It is the entanglement of all strangers*” (*The Ecological Thought* 47). Obviously, Morton’s dark ecology is enmeshed in strange strangers which, he argues, cannot entirely be known. As he explains it:

Each entity in the mesh looks strange. Nothing exists all by itself, and so nothing is fully “itself.” There is curiously “less” of the Universe at the same time, and for the same reasons, as we see “more” of it. Our encounter with other beings becomes profound. They are strange, even intrinsically strange. Getting to know them makes them stranger. When we talk about life forms, we’re talking about *strange strangers*. The ecological thought imagines a multitude of entangled strange strangers. (*The Ecological Thought* 15.)

What he suggests here is that strange strangers occupy “*a subaesthetic level of being, beyond the cute and beyond the awesome*” (Morton, *The Ecological Thought* 91). Here is the paradox that human beings and animals are visible and can be categorized as beautiful or ugly, depending on our anthropocentric perspectives. However, he prefers the totalization that strange strangers are dangerous,

disgusting, ugly, and even evil, in the process of becoming uncanny in the mesh. Morton complicates this understanding of dark ecology by suggesting uncanniness in strange strangers that “*are right next to us*” (*The Ecological Thought* 78) despite being “*strange to herself, or himself, or itself*” (*The Ecological Thought* 66). Even though all types of entities can be regarded to exist on the equal and same plane of the mesh, it is really difficult to discern the scale of strange strangers, for Morton claims strange strangers are both discernible and unknowable to humans: “*we must challenge our sense of what is real and what is unreal, what counts as existent and what counts as non-existent*” (*The Ecological Thought* 10). What Morton means by this reality versus unreality is ambiguous, but he implies that the present ecological predicament shows that the boundary between reality and appearance has dissolved in such a radical manner that it is no longer easy to understand the material world; instead, there is the mesh of dark ecology that renders humans and nonhumans coexistent in eerie ways.² His emphasis, in this respect, falls on the uncanny and the radical otherness of strange strangers to reveal that our material environment has become dark, and our ecological reality has been horrifying as well as spectral.

One theme repeatedly raised in Morton’s recent writings, though not highlighted as an alternative ecology, is spectrality. He proclaims that dark ecology is a “*spectral*” mesh of strange strangers. Spectrality is explained in the sense that, like strange strangers, it has both visible and invisible aspects, because the spectral realm connotes a non-existent space of spirits, ghosts, and phantoms that are liminal creatures. Hence, Morton’s dark ecology emerges as

a spectral realm in which all kinds of strange, uncanny entities flit about, hard to distinguish from one another in a thin or rigid way: vampires, ghosts, fingers, pieces of brain, phantom limbs, flowers, tropes, self-concepts, earlobes, appendices, swim bladders, minds, eyes, meadows, tardigrades, viruses. (“Ecology” 43-44).

Arguably, Morton deploys this concept so as to put emphasis not only on the radical otherness of nature, but also on the possibility of dissolving rigid boundaries between natural, cultural, and literary realms. Morton’s provocative statement, “*spectral beings emerge when the life-nonlife boundary collapses, along with the*

² Complicating the definition of what is real or unreal, Morton argues that a “*thing exceeds my capacity to grasp it. There is an inevitable gap between how it appears and what it is*” (“Specters of Ecology” 317).

human-nonhuman boundary” (“Specters of Ecology” 313) serves as the basis of his theorization of the ecological coexistence of the visible and the invisible.

[t]he more we think ecological beings—a human, a tree, an ecosystem, a cloud—the more we find ourselves obliged to think them not as alive or dead, but as spectral. The more we think them, moreover, the more we discover that such beings are not solidly “real” nor completely “unreal”— in this sense, too, ecological beings are spectral. In particular, ecological beings provide insights into the weird way in which entities are riven from within between what they are and how they appear. Another way of putting this is that beings, as a possibility condition for their existing at all, are specters. (“Specters of Ecology” 304).

This radical move in his sense of ecology seems highly speculative. Yet, it opens up a creative and literary space to speculate on what constitutes nature. In this vision, the divide between the immaterial and the material realms is blurred and dissolved, and thereby all beings become spectral.³ This brings the incorporeal into dark ecology, which is one of the most important leitmotifs used in Burnside’s novels and poems. It is within this context that this article will discuss *Glister*’s dark ecological approach to nature to see whether there is a way in which thinking about dark ecology could open up alternative spaces for contemporary definitions of nature in the novel. In order to further develop the convergence of ecology, humans, nonhumans, and toxicity, it will be helpful in elucidating Burnside’s understanding of nature in his oeuvre.

1) John Burnside and Dark Green Nature

Established his reputation as a prolific poet and writer in Scotland, John Burnside focuses on many subjects, such as nature, dwelling, home, alienation, masculinity, violence, death, life, and community, all of which are central to exposing the relations between the material and the spiritual, as well as understanding the tension between the self and the other. With his preoccupation with philosophical, religious, political, and ecological concerns in his verse and fiction Burnside produces, in his words, an “*ecological art*” that is concerned as much with material environments as with mysterious realms—one that would

³ What is interesting here is that Morton sees both human beings and nonhumans as a kind of ghost, a specter which is one of the main elements in the gothic tradition, referring to the invisible side of existence. Talking about spectrality in the gothic literature, Andrew Smith defines a spectre as “*an absent presence, a liminal being*” (147), while Julian Wolfreys notes that the spectral is “*neither alive nor dead*” (xi), underlining the liminality of a spectre.

“restore that mystery, to put us back into the open, to make us both vulnerable and wondrous again—to reconnect us” (“A Science of Belonging...” 105). In his effort to expand the bounds of un/reality, Burnside demonstrates what David James views as “a preoccupation with otherworldly locales and the sensations they elicit” (601). In fact, the polarities Burnside explores in his verse and fiction – nature/culture, spirit/matter, body/mind, love/hate – are efficiently laid out and gridded over one another in such an unexpected way that the interconnections can construct uncanny realms in which the boundary between these polarities becomes porous. These fictional spaces are not harmonious and healthy; instead, they are dangerous, unpleasant, and dark. Viewing the fictional spaces that Burnside has created as “liminal” (422), Astrid Bracke contends that Burnside’s universes are “strange, haunting and frequently thoroughly unpleasant places, filled with bewildering events and characters” (421). In this sense, Burnside projects his understanding of ecology on to his fictional landscapes that manifest a dark mystical sense of becoming with (dark) nature. At the root of his practice is an understanding that the environment is an uncanny, immense assemblage of not only human beings, but also nonhuman ones and inorganic forces, which transgresses the boundaries between the self and the other, nature and culture, and body and spirit because, as Burnside explains in an interview with Patricia McCarthy, the “green ‘movement’ has become one more refuge for fatcats and windbags – and it needs to be re-taken by deep (dark) ecology thinking” (“John Burnside” 34). In the same interview, he describes himself as “dark green” (“John Burnside” 34). His dark green ecological thought, like Morton’s dark perspective, does not offer a harmonious way of living with nature, or a retreat into wilderness; nor does he suggest that nature is fertile, stable, and exists for human ends. Instead, his dark world of ecology demonstrates an ever-changing entity reconfigured by nature-culture interchanges, and thus by industrial activities and capitalist practices. By so doing, he vacillates between “momentary identification with the ‘natural’ other and subsequent presentation of that other as completely at odds with, perhaps even inimical to, humanity” (Aretoulakis 182). Talking about this aspect of Burnside’s vision of nature, Louisa Gairn remarks that through deliberately “blurring the gaps between ‘self’ and ‘other,’ ‘human’ and ‘nature,’” Burnside “invites the reader to join him in deconstructing these binary oppositions,” which he thinks are “misleading and constrictive, exploring the liminal world which exists at the edges of such categories” (174). In this respect, Burnside

reveals this dark green space of liminality in a strange way that invites “*both tentative and radical, tender and violent movements of transgression*” (Griem 99).

Likewise, in suggesting that Burnside’s fiction and poetry present “*an exploration of the limina*” (“The Sustainable Male...” 77), David Borthwick contends that Burnside’s sense of ecology points to an “*openness to the original ‘other’ of nature*” (“The Sustainable Male...” 68). Here, crucial to Burnside’s vision of a dark ecology is an interconnectedness of liminal spaces and strange bodies where the boundary between spirit and matter is also blurred to the point of dissolution. In an interview with Attila Dosa, for example, Burnside, like Kingsnorth, concedes that spirit and matter complement each other from which Timothy Morton would refrain stating:

If you think in terms of “spirit,” you might be talking about something that at least wouldn’t be so easy to force into this kind of dualism. I wanted to replace the idea of duality, which suggests two separate things, with an idea of the binary, where the two things complement each other. What is interesting is the play between these imaginary forces that you might think of as spirit and matter. There is no such thing as matter separate from spirit, or spirit separate from matter. (“John Burnside: Poets and Other Animals” 119).

In the same interview, Burnside summarizes his ecological project as, “*The right dwelling in the world is the key to living as a spirit*” (“John Burnside: Poets and Other Animals” 119). This living as a spirit is something spectral to the world, a/n in/corporeal force sustained by mutability, contingency, and the interrelations of the material and the spiritual. In this way, Burnside attends to Morton’s debate on the spectral realm in dark ecology to challenge the familiar conceptions of nature, for dark nature contains the magical, uncanny space that is invisible. As Burnside puts it, the dark green and spectral space is “*populated by all manner of creature, many of them only half-human, and some wholly animal, vegetable or mineral. Not to mention scents, patterns, shadows, numbers*” (“John Burnside” 30). Yet, this spectral environment might haunt the material one, as Graeme Macdonald notes, because nature is frequently depicted as “*a kind of active revenant in Burnside’s work; haunting or reclaiming territory lost or violently reshaped by human modes of production*” (Macdonald 225-226). For Burnside, the depictions of these material and spectral realms need to be made strange by including terror and “*awe*.” He claims that “*awe is central, is vitally necessary, to any description of the world. A description that lacks this awe is, in truth, a lie*” (“A Science of Belonging...” 95).

Filled with disturbing images of violence, loss, death, and haunting, Burnside's *Glister* epitomizes this credo, forsaking realistic depictions of nature by creating a spectral space whose porous boundary easily seeps into the material one. Two distinctive yet entwined approaches to nature coalesce in Burnside's dark green vision of nature. He exposes a dark ecology of otherness and alterity, presenting a toxic portrait of reality in which the visible world is just an illusory layer that envelopes a liminal, "depthless ecology" (Morton, *The Ecological Thought* 59) populated by postnatural and spectral forces. Dark ecology, then, finds a fictional embodiment in *Glister*.

2) *Glister* and the Postecological Realm

Glister illustrates an ongoing battle between the forces of capitalism on the one hand and mundane human and natural life on the other, thereby criticizing industrial encroachment on nature. In other words, it conjures up a dark ecological space in which pollution entirely swallows up both the natural and the social. Burnside shows the readers a toxic earth they know in a weird way that makes them realize they have never actually looked at it. Displaying the vicissitudes of a toxic life, the novel is a haunting text that recounts a physical and moral carnage resulting from consumerism, industrialism, and docility. Adventuring into both real and afterlife realms, Burnside surveys human frailty and "natural" resilience against the backdrop of a nightmarish territory, questioning the extent to which human beings, animals, and ghosts are implicated in dark-green nature. Burnside then can be said to reimagine our relations to the environment, industrialism, and society, illustrating a noxious world in which one cannot find a true sense of belonging but death, annihilation, and entropy.

In *Glister*, Burnside ushers us into a tenebrous realm of an enclosed Scottish community of the Innertown inevitably affected by postindustrialization. At its heart stands a defunct chemical plant that slowly poisons and kills people, animals, and trees and plants. This noxious but mysterious factory contaminates not only the bodies but also the spirits of people in the Innertown. The people become so sick, docile, and apathetic to their environment that only existential despair can define their predicament exacerbated by toxicity. Beneath the secrets of the Innertown lies an unsettling account of five disappearing boys in the dark, poisoned woods: Mark Wilkinson, William Ash, Alex Slocombe, Stewart Riva, and Liam Nugent. The people believe the boys simply ran away, but that is not the case. The local policeman, John Morrison, finds Mark Wilkinson strung up from the tree and ritualistically

slain, but, instead of writing a report on the incident, he calls Brian Smith, the owner of the plant linked to the Consortium, an organization of local and international companies that built the chemical plant thirty years ago. Then, together they cover up such disappearances, but the guilt-ridden Morrison creates a memorial garden in the woods to repent and mourn for Mark and the dead. Trying to come to terms with the fact that the town is dying and his schoolmates are disappearing, the protagonist, Leonard Wilson—a teenager, member of the violent gang that hunts animals, and eventually kills Andrew Rivers, who is believed to be a paedophile—undertakes his own investigation in the poisoned woods. As a precocious boy and a voracious reader, Leonard stands for youth, passion, hope and resilience amidst the Innertown’s darkness, with his girlfriend Elspeth whose only aim is to have sex. Leonard, curious to find out what happens to the town’s missing teenagers, shows intimate interest in the eerie, even spectral landscape in which the toxic plant and forest compete with and complement one another. During his journey in the forest, Leonard encounters and befriends the Moth Man, who is a mysterious “murderer” visiting the town every year to collect moths. At the end, Leonard, who is, the reader suspects, the Moth Man’s next victim, goes through the portal called “*Glisten*” and arrives at the spectral realm in which he tells of this story of the wasteland of human grievances.

With Leonard’s story, Burnside envisages a dark nature of toxicity in the narrative, foregrounding the borderlands between life and death, pleasure and pain, rapture and terror. His aim is to show that ecology is a much weirder phenomenon capable of possessing super/post-natural dimensions that are totally “inhuman,”⁴ which can be described as a postecological reality. Unfolding in two main sections entitled as “*The Book of Job*” and “*The Fire Sermon*,” the narrative presents a Scottish region divided into two territories, Innertown and Outertown, separated by “the former golf course, conveniently situated so as to divide the good people in the nice houses” (*Glisten* 61). The Innertown, with the derelict chemical factory nearby, epitomizes “a ghetto for poisoned, cast-off workers” (*Glisten* 61), whereas the Outertown has “ranch-style villas with wide, miraculously green lawns and hedges” (*Glisten* 61). In this way, the novel juxtaposes the Outertown with the Innertown, but it prioritizes the abject spectacle of the Innertown’s wasteland; indeed, both of them are part of what Timothy Morton describes as mesh. Deploying the chemical plant and the poisoned forest as dark ecologies of otherness to illustrate the

⁴ Jeffrey J. Cohen uses inhuman to “emphasize both difference (*‘in-’* as negative prefix) and intimacy (*‘in-’* as indicator of estranged interiority)” (*Stone: An Ecology of the Inhuman* 10).

porosity between nature and culture, *Glister* works from the premise that ecological collapse brings social collapse. This defunct chemical factory entirely poisons everything: the soil, the air, vegetation, animals, and people living in the Innertown. As the narrator explains, “[e]verybody understands, by now, that the entire land under their feet is irredeemably soured, poisoned by years of run-off and soakaway from the plant” (*Glister* 10). Toxic chemicals and deadly poisons leaking out of the defunct factory have already mutated both human and nonhuman realms, forming dark ecologies and strange corporealities:

You could see evidence wherever you looked of the plant’s effects on the land: avenues of dead trees, black and skeletal along the old rail tracks and access roads; great piles of sulfurous rocks where pools of effluent had been left to evaporate in the sun. A few keen fishermen found mutant sea creatures washed up on the shore, ... and some people claimed that they had seen bizarre animals out in the remaining tracts of woodland, not sick, or dying, but not right either, with their enlarged faces and swollen, twisted bodies. (*Glister* 11).

This passage reveals how the wretched chemical plant epitomizes what Rob Nixon calls “*slow violence*” of toxicity, one that is “*neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales*” (2). In this respect, the slow violence in the Innertown, whether visible or invisible, regularly kills numerous people suffering from “*unexplained clusters of rare cancers,*” “*mysterious behavioral problems,*” depression, and mental illnesses (Burnside, *Glister* 12). For instance, Leonard’s father, James Wilson, who was once a worker at the plant, is the victim of this contamination although he insists that the chemicals are harmless:

it was all harmless agricultural material: fertilisers and pesticides, fungicides, growth accelerants or growth retardants, complicated chains of molecules that got into the root or the stem of a plant and changed how it grew, or when it flowered, or whether it set seed. (*Glister* 12).

His slow death, as told by Leonard, is the very result of these chemicals. “A large percentage of the people who worked in production at the plant are either sick or dead now. My dad, for example. My dad has been sick for almost as long as I can remember” (*Glister* 70), Leonard affirms, suggesting that toxic exposure will finally culminate in death. And toxicity makes every human body sick, illustrating the vulnerability of human life. His girlfriend, Elspeth, adds at one point that “[s]ome of

us are still healthy, but it's only a matter of time" (Glister 99), since it is a very well-known fact that *"the sickness was already there, waiting to happen"* (Glister 98). This kind of slow death as a pervasive fate befalling the people is an extremity produced by industrial practices. As underlined in the above long quotation, specifically *"dead trees," "mutant sea creatures,"* and *"bizarre animals"* with corporeal condition of disfigured faces point to the imbrication of toxicity and nonhumans, as well. *"Exposing the lethal interchanges of bodies and xenobiotic substances that percolate through soil, air, and water"* (Oppermann 284), Glister also exemplifies the *"toxic kinship"* between humans and nonhumans. The toxic predicament illustrates how human and nonhuman life is precarious, and how bodies are permeable, indeterminate, and contingent. In this sense, the toxic kinship points to a dark ontology in which humans, nonhumans, the ecosystem, and even objects are intermingled in the mesh on a complex scale. In other words, every entity in the Innertown, including Leonard, the chemical plant, and the toxic forest, emerges as strange strangers. They are totally strange strangers, because they are strange to each other in an uncannily interconnected way. This coexistence in the novel manifests ineradicable relations between pain, violence, and what Leonard strangely claims, the beauty of the world as he finds the factory beautiful. Burnside's dark ecological town, however, is only filled with dangerous and repulsive strange strangeness, and obviously lacks any sense of beauty. Therefore, the darkness of toxicity, as Burnside explores in the novel, culminates in death, annihilation, mutation, and sickness.

The very sources of this darkness, the chemical plant and the forest are, moreover, foreign to human beings and relentlessly hostile. They are transitional environments that transcend the familiar concepts of the natural or the unnatural. Burnside provides a musing on what the poisoned forest and the plant mean when brought into a new relationship with dark ecology beset by an unfolding postnatural process. The postnatural forest on the edge of the town as part of the mesh is called the *"poisoned wood"* (Glister 16) by everyone. Toxicity has blackened the trees, and the contamination has spread beneath the surface: *"This wood has poison running in its veins, in the sap of every tree, in every crumb of loam and every blade of grass under my feet"* (Glister 197). The wood is a dark composition of strange strangers, such as deformed trees and animals affected by spreading chemicals, a moribund place of loss, death, and withdrawal. Yet, it does not lose its vitality; instead, it emerges as a liminal zone between life and nonlife:

the trees, though still alive, were strangely black, a black that didn't look like charring or the result of drought, but rather suggested that the trees were veined with a dark, poisoned sap, black, but with a trace of livid green in the essence of it, a green that was bitter and primordial, like wormwood, or gall. (*Glister* 16).

The dark green imagery teeming with dark life within blackened trees illustrates how nonhuman actors are resilient despite the fact that, for Burnside, *“Pan is still there, in the woods, in the shadows, and he is the ‘green force’ that renews and perpetuates our traditions”* (*“The Wonder of Daylight...”* 57). This dark ecology, as Jeffrey J. Cohen would suggest, *“reveals the inhuman as a thriving of life in other forms, a vitality even in the decay that demonstrates how the nonhuman is already inside, cohabitating and continuing”* (*“Grey”* 272). Burnside successfully conveys this inhuman intensity and change of the in/organic life that springs from his dark green landscape. The novel also echoes what Morton claims in explaining dark ecology, that *“Nature is no longer unhuman but inhuman, radically different, irreducibly strange”* (*“Dark Ecology”* 265). Revealing this strangeness, Leonard posits the noxious wood as a spectral realm in which myth and reality are commingling:

Everybody has a theory about the secret fauna of the headland. People tell stories about all kinds of real or imaginary encounters: they see herds of strange animals, they catch glimpses of devils, sprites, fairies, they come face to face with terribly disfigured or angelic-looking mutants from old science-fiction programs on late-night TV. And it's not just animals they see. You hear all kinds of stories about mysterious strangers: lone figures stealing through the woods, gangs of men roaming around at night, a criminal element who come in from the shore side to see what they can steal from the plant, troublemakers and pikeys, sex perverts and terrorists. (*Glister* 113).

It is through Leonard that Burnside signals the advent of a new coexistence of real and unreal entities in dark ecology, which is profoundly affected not only by material realities that have a great impact on humans and nonhumans, but also unreal, mysterious, and uncanny entities we cannot know or we can only imagine. Just as Morton posits ecological bodies as monstrous, strange or spectral, Burnside accepts the suggestion that the ecological world is full of strange strangers, a spectral realm fraught with mystery, horror, and paradox. In fact, *“strange*

animals,” “devils, sprites, fairies,” “mutants,” and “mysterious strangers” embody what Morton describes as the strange stranger:

I use *strange stranger*. This stranger isn't just strange. She, or he, or it – can we tell? how? – is strangely strange. Their strangeness itself is strange. We can never absolutely figure them out. If we could, then all we would have is a ready-made box to put them in, and we would just be looking at the box, not at the strange strangers. They are intrinsically strange. Do we know for sure whether they are sentient or not? Do we know whether they are alive or not? Their strangeness is part of who they are. (*The Ecological Thought* 41).

All living, non-living, and imaginary creatures that inhabit the mesh are in themselves strange, uncanny, and even dangerous. In conjunction with this dark ecological vision, Burnside acknowledges the mystery of the strange stranger in the examples of the poisoned wood and the chemical plant.

The chemical plant and its toxic vicinity become a “*home*” for adolescent boys of the Innertown as a playground and for a child-murderer. Although the novel is concerned with the disappearance of some teenage boys around the disused factory, the focus is on the protagonist, teenage Leonard Wilson, who is adrift in the punitive world of postindustrial society. Leonard, who wonders about the missing boys, and is fond of wandering around the plant, plunges right into dark ecology engendered by the toxic plant and the poisoned woods. They become a locus for dark desire, the spectral, and strangely enough, the beautiful. Leonard's way out is to “*love*” the poisonous plant and to seek beauty in what is utterly ugly. He states that “*if you want to stay alive, which is hard to do in a place like this, you have to love something, and the one thing I love is the chemical plant*” (*Glister* 60). Leonard does not shrink from the ugliness and darkness that accompany the breaking down of natural and cultural spheres in dark ecology. Immersed in becoming one with the toxic earth, instead, Leonard has a prominent role to play in articulating a dark ecological conception of nature. Commenting on the idea that “*you're definitely weird, if you love the plant*” (*Glister* 60), he discovers the “*beauty*” in the midst of the contamination:

The thing is, I know everybody says it's dangerous, that it's making us all sick, that they should have razed it to the ground years ago and cleared the entire eastern peninsula instead of just leaving it to rot—and that's all true, I know that, but you still have to admit that it's beautiful. Maybe there are more obviously beautiful places in

Canada or California, maybe they have gardens and parks with clear lakes and honest-to-Betsy live trees with autumn leaves and all the stuff you see on television, but we don't have those things. All we have is the plant. (*Glister* 60).

As a desperate boy in this uncanny land, Leonard is overawed by the ugly, wretched chemical plant although it is constantly poisoning while it glistens. The plant induces a blend of pleasure and anxiety, and Leonard's attachment to this plant is immediate and profound. Therefore, he questions the concept of beauty in itself without any suggestion that beauty "*has come to be equated with what we can control ... what we can, and choose, to save*" (Hird 256). Leonard notes that

it's just that things are beautiful, only what you mean by beautiful is different from what people usually mean when they say that word. It's not sentimental, or choccy box. It's beautiful, and it's terrible too. It takes your breath away, but you don't know if that comes from awe or terror. Sometimes, I wonder why people think so little of beauty, why they think it's just calendars and pictures of little white churches or mountain streams in adverts and travel brochures. Why do they settle for that? I'm only fifteen, and even I can see there's more to it than that. (*Glister* 212).

Capable to see the beauty inherent in the strange strangers, and to see beyond the material, Leonard senses that beauty takes on a numinous, spectral reality that transcends usual imagery through more attention to strange strangers. Julika Griem calls Burnside's landscapes as "*liminal beauty*" (101), because it is as strange as the chemical plant. Here, Leonard also shares what Morton suggests: "*beauty is always haunted by its disgusting, spectral double, the kitsch*" ("*Specters of Ecology*" 305). In that sense, Leonard does succeed in evoking an immanent realm of uncanniness. The intensity of this strangeness is distilled into the way Leonard develops with dark nature. The change in his perception of ecological reality can be seen in the example of snow as he describes how the headland have a numinous appearance:⁵

When the first snow comes, you start to see new things, and you realize how much of the world is invisible, or just on the point of being seen [...] And then there's the way it's all transformed, how it all looks so innocent, as if it couldn't hurt you in a million years, all

⁵ The images, such as the snow, ghosts, cottonwood, and whiteness, are recurrent in Burnside's oeuvre, and, as he highlights it, they are "*my existence. I would say that this is where the self who 'already was' dwells*" ("John Burnside" 28).

those drums of crusted and curdled effluent, all those pits with their lingering traces of poison or radiation, or whatever it is the authorities want to keep sealed up here, along with the dangerous mass of our polluted bodies. Under the snow, it all looks pure, even when a wet rust mark bleeds through, or some trace of cobalt blue or verdigris rises up through an inch of white, it's beautiful. (*Glister* 64).

This ecological aesthetic vision expresses how the imbrication of the visible and the invisible transforms the headland into a dark allure haunted by toxicity. Finding dark nature both beautiful and frightening, fraught with mystery and wonder, Leonard sees the chemical plant as a spectral force haunting the people of Innertown. The insight operates not through disenchantment but through ecological awareness of this strangeness. For Burnside, the recognition of dark ecology provides a way for the reenchantment of dark green nature although uncanny encounters with strange strangers become, in Morton's words, "*loving, risky, [and] perverse*" (*The Ecological Thought* 81). Thus, Burnside's depictions of familiar and strange landscapes possess a luminous quality projecting a sense of wonder at the discovery of a new but dark spectral realm.

Burnside penetrates much further than Morton into the spectral/spiritual side of ecology by means of what Leonard goes through, however. It is throughout the novel that Leonard searches and longs for sanctifying something that has what Burnside posits "*living as a spirit*" much like Paul Kingsnorth's vision of sacred nature. Leonard ponders, for instance, if not-green and wasted places have this spirit:

They say every place has its own spirit, but when they talk about it in books and poems and stuff, they always mean places like bosky groves, or dark reed beds where Pan sits playing his pipes to some lost nymph, or maybe some lake with a lady sleeping just beneath the surface, but why not an old warehouse, or a cooled furnace? Why not a landfill? (*Glister* 211).

In this way, Leonard, stranded in the wasteland, tries to find a place which he wants to become part of. However, what only remains in this derelict town is the chemical plant, along with the poisoned woods. The chemical plant that drains the vitality of humans and nonhumans has a spectral presence, resembling Kingsnorth's depiction of "*chaos, uncertainty, loss*" (222) to which Leonard feels an obsessive spiritual attachment. In talking about it, he remarks:

I'd always felt something out at the chemical plant, no matter where I went. You could call it a spirit, or a *genius loci*—why not? It was present, and I always thought it was trying to talk to me. Not in words, though. Not like that. It was more like pointing. It was there, pointing to something I should know about, something I should have seen beyond the things I was seeing, but it wasn't concerned with what you could say in words. [...] Sometimes, the whole world points to something you can't see, some essence, some hidden principle. You can't see it, but you can feel it, though you have no idea how to put it into words. (*Glister* 211-212).

Leonard shows a “*reverence*” for the plant because “*this apparent wasteland is all the church we have,*” and “*what I have chanced upon is a secret ceremony, a private ritual*” (*Glister* 66). In fact, this side of the toxic plant gives Leonard a strange sense of existence blending the material and the spiritual, creating a kind of relief for him. As such, Burnside's theme of the liminality between the material and the spiritual is linked to the strange strangers: the plant, the woods, and the town. This rupture provides a dark, spectral realm in which uncanny entities and the environment are equally implicated, much like Morton's dark ecology of specters.

Interestingly enough, *Glister* opens with Leonard's spectral presence in his “*afterlife*” narration although he insists that “*there is no afterlife, because there is no after. It's always now, and everything – past and future, problem and resolution, life and death – everything is simultaneous here, at this point, in this moment*” (*Glister* 2). This is a spectral abyss also called “*Heaven, Hell, Tir Na Nog, the Dreamtime*” (*Glister* 2), an uncanny space in which nonhumans like gulls reside as specters. As a strange stranger now, Leonard talks about how everything becomes one with what Morton terms as “*super-natural,*” or “*extra Nature*” (*The Ecological Thought* 45). Here, Leonard announces the central theme of the novel that “*everything is transformed, everything becomes, and that becoming is the only story that continues forever. Everything becomes everything else, moment by moment, for all time*” (*Glister* 2). This process in the atemporal and incorporeal space reconciles the living and the dead, the past and the future, presuming the possibility of a way to liberation for Leonard who sometimes remembers, sometimes forgets. Burnside explicitly wants a radical reconfiguration of that mysterious, wondrous, and unknown realm even though he does not have any clear concept of what this place might be. It is, in fact, the very “*mesh,*” an uncanny and liminal space that allows human and nonhuman, living and non-living, or real and imaginary entities to exist together. But, what really

frames Burnside's perspective is the imbrication of the human and the nonhuman environments where the corporeal and the incorporeal constitutes an ecological un/reality. In this regard, Burnside's novel does not solely echo the thoughts of Morton. Rather, he combines both Kingsnorth's and Morton's approaches, suggesting that every place, toxic or natural, is living as a spirit, a spectre haunting humans and nonhumans, and hence, it is necessary to acknowledge our dwelling within the mesh. His plea, in this respect, is for a redress of humans' disenchantment with dark or super-nature.

The new relationship in *Glister* between Leonard and the material/spectral environment involves a new sensuous grasp of the mesh. It also reflects Burnside's search for a new depiction of life which relates to a unity between dark nature and humans and nonhumans. Burnside presents this relationship just as strange as he does in the example of the Moth Man who wanders around the poisoned woods by his van and studies butterflies and moths for his project Lepidoptera. The Moth Man, who is able to "read the landscape" (*Glister* 122), is a strange stranger whom Leonard assumes is "*the mystery,*" "*yin and yang, thesis, antithesis, synthesis; he was the dialectic in the form of a living, breathing friend*" (*Glister* 246). Describing the Moth Man as a spectre, Leonard adds that he is "*new: an unforeseeable new creature, suddenly released from some secret hiding place to walk and breathe and act, as if for the first time*" (*Glister* 246). As a mysterious stranger or implied murderer, the Moth Man haunts the Innertown and Leonard, but also guides Leonard to see the interconnective mesh beyond the material by means of a strange, drugged tea:

I can see everything around me in perfect, almost dizzying detail, but I can also feel how one thing is connected to the next, and that thing to the next after that, or not connected, so much, but all one thing. Everything's one thing. It's not a matter of connections, it's an indivisibility. A unity. I can feel the world reaching away around me in every direction, the world and everything alive in it, every bud and leaf and bird and frog and bat and horse and tiger and human being, every fern and clubmoss, every fish and fowl, every serpent, all the sap and blood warmed by the sun, everything touched by the light, everything hidden in the darkness. It's all one. There isn't a me or a not-me about it. It's all continuous and I'm alive with everything that lives. (*Glister* 129).

What is so extraordinary is that Leonard is looking through the material realm from the other side of the mesh through some hyper-senses. Regardless of whether this is a Gaian holism, as this long quotation illustrates, Burnside's treatment of unity and oneness receives a new expression with regards to Morton's conception of the spectral mesh, raising the fundamental question as to what constitutes "nature." The spectral here is crucial to "*seeing the extra dimension*" (Morton, *The Ecological Thought* 56), and living and non-living entities as specters "*constitute a mesh, a nontotalizable, open-ended concatenation of interrelations that blur and confound boundaries at practically any level: between species, between the living and the nonliving, between organism and environment*" ("Queer Ecology" 275-276). Leonard is literally transported into this spectral realm of the mesh, which brings about an ecological awareness built upon coexistence. Thus, his fascination with this mesh might explain his love for the chemical plant, the poisoned woods, and other disgusting objects in the Innertown. The primary beauty for Leonard, upon which all material and spectral life is to be based, is the reconciliation in the mesh although they are strange to themselves. Commenting upon the "*neo-spiritual*" aspect of Leonard's vision, Florian Niedlich reads this passage as follows: Leonard's "vision of ultimate reality, in which all contraries are reconciled," and "his momentary reconnection with nature and return to the original oneness" are "the only true source of comfort and relief in the badlands of the Innertown" (*Glister* 219). This remark reminds us that Burnside reverses the dualisms of mind/body, and spirit/matter to jar us into a recognition of the liminality between the material immanent reality and the incorporeal spectrality, and of the borderland between the self and the other. In this way, as Monika Szuba puts it, Burnside proposes to "*abolish the view of the natural, in which the human and the animal are separated, the former absent from his bodily reality,*" suggesting that "*[o]scillating between exteriority and interiority, Burnside sees a possibility of a nondualistic, embodied understanding of subjectivity*" (34). As such, Burnside brings bodily self into dialogue with the ecological other in the uncanny, spectral mesh of strange strangers. Abolishing the boundary between the self and dark nature is of primary importance for Burnside. For instance, the murdered man, Andrew Rivers, comments at one point that "*[w]e tire of the self, of the shape of it, and its slightly exaggerated colours; most of all, we tire of its constant noise and just long for a little quiet*" (*Glister* 167). This stillness Rivers yearns for emerges after the sensuous corporeal reconnection with super-nature. Like Rivers, Leonard feels "*beautiful stillness*" (*Glister* 132) after he gains oneness with the mesh. Burnside, in this

regard, attempts to break down the invisible wall between the human self and the natural other through becoming one with dark nature. At the end of the novel, Leonard's tendency to love turns to the idea of "to be" something: "if you want to stay alive, you have to love something. Though maybe love is the wrong word after all. Maybe you have to be something" (*Glister* 251). It is worth noting that the emphasis upon becoming, to be something, or the idea of oneness, exhibits how the boundary between the self and the other, subject and object is reconciled merely through the recognition of otherness, alterity, and vitality of dark nature. As Timothy Baker sums up reflecting on *Glister*, "[b]eing, and being one with the world, is the only idea of life that remains. Being is both becoming and stasis: it is simply life" (144). Yet, undoubtedly, this life is a dark green one to which Burnside pays special attention.

3) Ecological Grief

This dark life, nevertheless, evokes a melancholy, despair, and grief not just for human loss, but the human disenchantment of ecological reality. Accordingly, by the murders of teenage boys, and the toxic space of the Innertown, Burnside articulates a lament for the worst that can happen anywhere. So, he not only complicates Timothy Morton's idea of melancholy predicated on loving dark ecology, the otherness of dark nature, but also presents a commentary on what Paul Kingsnorth posits as eco-grief, exemplifying the docility of the people of the Innertown. In terms of human loss, first, it is John Morrison, the local constable of the Innertown, who mourns for human mortality to reflect the failure of the capitalist community, along with yearning for more intimate relations with the world around him. The Innertown is so traumatized and overwhelmed by the missing teenagers that the disappearances now seem mundane and humdrum. When the first boy, Mark Wilkinson, is lost, John Morrison goes to the Wilkinson family to learn Mark's whereabouts, only to find the family too oblivious to speak about this event. Later, just as John searches for the lost boy in the poisoned woods, he discovers Mark's slain body hanging from a tree and arranged like a ritual killing:

A boy's body, Mark Wilkinson's body, suspended from the bough of the largest tree; suspended, perfectly bright and neat and—this was what disturbed Morrison most, this was what his mind kept going back to afterward—absurdly gift wrapped, at the throat and around the chest and ankles, in tinsel and bright lengths of fabric, like a decoration or a small gift hung on a Christmas tree. (*Glister* 26).

The moment John witnesses this horrendous spectacle, he gets petrified and, later, describes Mark as a strange stranger, saying that *“most of his clothes had been removed, leaving him so thin and stark and creaturely that he looked more like some new kind of animal than his early teens”* (Glister 28). Despite noticing Mark’s creaturely corporeality as a strange stranger, John phones Brian Smith who orders a coverup. Together, thus, they become complicit in hiding the reality behind the disappearances. As the narrator asserts, John *“made the worst mistake he could have made”* (Glister 32). For that reason, John and the community, Leonard tells us, are *“unforgivable”* for this *“sin”* (Glister 249). John’s only redemption is to secretly make a memorial garden in the poisoned woods as a shrine to the missing boys to whom the town’s people are oblivious. His garden is a *“sacred place”* which is *“a neat square of poppies and carnations, dotted here and there with the knuckles of polished glass and stone that he collects on his long walks around the Innertown and the wasteland beyond”* (Glister 7). It is through his garden that he repents his sin and mourns for the boys, because he believes that mourning can reconstruct the community that entirely fails in the Innertown. He feels a yearning for the communal remembrance: *“It’s a town that remembers its dead, a town where everyone remembers together, guarding the ancestors in their ancient solitude, long after they might have imagined themselves forgotten”* (Glister 51). For him, individual and communal mourning works as the basis of all relationships as he tries to create a bond with the dead.

Similar to John’s, Leonard’s story also evokes a sense of remembering and forgetting in relation to the theme of death. At the beginning of the novel, Leonard says the following words: *“I want to tell it [the story] in full even as I forget it, and so, by telling and forgetting, forgive everyone who figures there, including myself,”* suggesting that *“this is where the future begins: in the forgotten, in what is lost”* (Glister 1). The lamentation shows how Leonard mourns the loss of life, and he wants to be remembered by telling his story: *“it’s good for the dead to be remembered”* (Glister 124). However, this grief is in fact the indicator of the acceptance of death, because Leonard wants to be in Glister, an imaginary acronym of George Lister and Son, who built the plant. One of the tenets of dark ecology is to see death as a radical otherness of dark nature. As Morton suggests, the *“task is not to bury the dead but to join them, to be bitten by the undead and become them”* (Ecology without Nature... 201). Hence, Leonard, questioning life and death, becomes the merger between the living and the dead.

Here, the Innertown, the chemical plant, and the garden are a graveyard laden with grief, melancholy, and lament, positioned somewhere between life and death. For example, suspecting that John Morrison may be the murderer, Leonard comes across the garden in the woods, insisting that this “*isn't a garden, it's a grave. Something is buried here. Something, or somebody*” (Glister 195). As part of dark ecology, the garden/grave/plant/Innertown imagery evokes a sense of life in death or death in life as in Morton's claim that dark nature is a realm “*of life and death, of death-in-life and life-in-death, an undead place of zombies, viroids, junk DNA, ghosts, silicates, cyanide, radiation, demonic forces, and pollution*” (*Hyperobjects...* 126). The garden/grave wavering between the material and the immaterial indicates the only consolation for John, the constable, who is “*an expert in mourning*” (Glister 52). As the novel underlines it, what John really mourns for is the vanished relations among the Innertown people:

Mimosa pudica, that was it. Pale green, slightly downy plants, with their sensitive, finger-like leaves and perfectly engineered stems that simply folded at any contact till they were all but absent. A fingertip, the nib of a pen, even a single water drop. That was all it took to make the whole plant collapse. A single touch, and everything fell away, till all you were left with was an indifferent, infinitely patient absence. Sometimes, Morrison feels that this is what he mourns more than anything: that this is the true source of his grief. He had expected to be touched [...]. (Glister 53).

What is healing for John is to touch human or nonhuman entities. Here, the plant along with the garden, teeming with nonhumans, links human loss and personal ruination with the loss of nature. As Paul Kingsnorth remarks, there is “*a way to work through the grief caused by the end of much of what we hold dear*” (98), in that grieving is a way of accepting what has happened to humans or nonhumans. In this regard, neither John nor Leonard deny grief and melancholy found in life and death; rather, they see the garden and the chemical plant respectively as a way out in the wasteland of the Innertown even though the tragic melancholy that dark ecology incites continues to haunt them in terms of a blend of detachment and involvement. Terrence Rafferty, reviewing *Glister*, notes: “*What is most beautiful, and most frightening about the novel itself is its melancholy awareness of how desperate our acts of devotion can be in places like this toxic town, how terrible the things we can learn to love*” (“Disappeared”). The recognition of this dark green nature thus becomes the very source of eco-grief.

Eco-grief might be associated with the disconnection of people from nature that causes suffering, pain, and death, an existential despair exhibited by the Innertown people whose “*sole business is slow decay*” (Glister 9). As the inhabitants yield to stagnation and paralysis, they can only eke out a toxic existence. Leonard points out that the people are “*bound to this soil, not by work or family or some more general fondness for the light or the weather, but by inertia*” (Glister 78). At no point does Leonard believe that this inert community has a way out. Disappointed with this plight, Leonard maintains that “*everybody blames these problems on the plant, but they don’t have the energy to do anything about it*” (Glister 12). When toxicity contaminates not merely bodies but also minds and spirits, it becomes impossible to eradicate lethargy in the community. As Emily Horton remarks, “*it is not only nature and bodies that are affected, but also souls, whereby indifference to abuse and oppression now constitute unmistakable components of Innertown consciousness*” (76). The indifference and stagnation illustrate the way that the people become totally estranged from and oblivious to their bodies, friends, family, and the environment which surrounds them in this dark ecological world. Calling attention to this, Terrence Rafferty points out that “*[d]esper, denial and an awful, endemic quiescence have seeped into their souls*” (“Disappeared”). In this sense, *Glister* demonstrates how spiritual infection follows material contamination, which then urges us to speculate whether the soul is in itself dark. The religious and literary allusions to The Book of Job and The Fire Sermon found in both *The Waste Land* by T. S. Eliot and Buddhism inform this vision. When the Moth Man and Leonard torture John Morrison at the chemical plant, for instance, John’s opinion is the following:

It’s something that Morrison finds insulting, as if this man wants to deny him everything, not just a life, or an explanation, but even a soul. Or maybe what he is denying is the soul itself. The very possibility of a soul. Someone like Morrison can’t have a soul of his own, because the soul is intrinsically good, intrinsically clean, a piece of property borrowed from God and all His angels, to be returned some day, pearly and clean and undamaged. The idea makes Morrison angry, and he wants to tell this man, this boy, that he’s wrong, that the soul is wet and dark, a creature that takes up residence in the human body like a parasite and feeds on it, a creature hungry for experience and power and possessed of an inhuman joy that cares nothing for its host, but lives, as it must live, in perpetual, disfigured longing. (Glister 236).

Giving the example of parasite, Burnside shows how both spirit and body are deeply embedded in the darkness, while presenting “a commitment to spiritual contemplation of humanity’s plight in the face of environmental degradation” (Borthwick, “To Comfort Me with Nothing...” 91).

Conclusion

Glister as a novel of dark ecology is a toxic voyage into the darkness of human beings and the material environment through a critique of postindustrial community and culture, deliberately juxtaposing the spectral mesh with the mere quotidian stasis to which characters aspire in their life. In that sense, *Glister* speaks to our age with painful and melancholic insight not only in its critique of postindustrial practices, but also in its fascinating depiction of dark green ecology. In short, *Glister* evinces a compelling sense of the uncanny, exemplifying the major environmental threat of pollution confronting today’s societies.

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