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Into the Desert: Ecopsychological Explorations in Paul Bowles's *The Sheltering Sky*

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Abstract

Paul Bowles's novel *The Sheltering Sky* (1949) portrays Port and Kit Moresby's existential journey through the North African desert, a landscape that not only shapes their external experiences but also reflects their unconscious processes and emotional dissociation. The desert in the novel functions as a metaphor for the abyss of the human soul and a stimulus for metamorphosis. This resonates with Jung's ideas of ecopsychology, which offer a rich landscape for understanding the psychological dimensions of nature and how it influences the human psyche. Within this trajectory, the paper argues that the novel serves as a psychological investigation into the consequences of detachment from both the inner self and the natural environment. It argues that none of the characters in *The Sheltering Sky* achieve genuine individuation, the integration of conscious and unconscious dimensions and the reconciliation of ego and shadow, revealing instead the tragic effects of spiritual disconnection and ecological alienation. Grounded in Jung's archetypal framework, particularly the Self and the Shadow, as pivotal elements of individuation, the study delves into Bowles's depiction of psychic disintegration that arises when characters confront the untempered, primordial forces of nature. Through this Jungian ecopsychological lens, this work offers new insights into the intrinsic bond between the psyche, nature, and existential identity.

Keywords Paul Bowles · *The Sheltering Sky* · Jung · ecopsychology · individuation

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Introduction

Paul Bowles: The Desert Personified

"Almost all of the literature on grief pertains to the death of humans."
(Phyllis Windle, 1992, p. 137)

Paul Bowles, an American expatriate author, is closely associated with the region where he lived, and his characters vividly illustrate the relationship between their emotional and psychological conditions and the essence of the surrounding nature. A master of delineating the junction between the external and internal worlds, he is revered for his ability to merge resonant landscapes with the psychological distress of his characters. Violent events, psychological turmoil, and existential crises devised in an elegantly crafted style pervade his works, shaping their narratives. He made his home in Tangier, Morocco, where he found deep inspiration in its enigmatic spirit for his influential works, notably his novel *The Sheltering Sky* (1949) and the short story collection *Points in Time* (1982). Bowles presents an adept depiction of an unforgiving desert and its harsh realities, which surface as a perfect setting that is in tandem with the characters' internal struggles. Through his novel, Bowles creates a palette of themes including alienation, identity crisis, and existential angst. More than that, Bowles takes full advantage of the idea that *The Sheltering Sky* is nothing if not a contemplation of the Sahara Desert, which overwhelms the landscape both outside and inside the characters. The desert rises as an edifice where humans and nature meet.

Bowles was born in 1910, when America was undergoing a radical change in its belief and thinking systems. It was a moment when the ideas of Darwin and Freud were being accepted widely by New Yorkers and would somehow find a way to sneak into Bowles's mindscape. Even though he was denied freedom in his life, let alone the opportunity to express himself, by his parents, especially his father, he was inescapably exposed to these new secular ideas, which deeply affected his childhood psychology and education. Bowles's novels and stories are evidence of his own state of mind, psychology, and background as well as the people of New York and the life of the expatriate in a place like North Africa.

An overt emphasis on the enigmatic nature of Bowles's character implies that while the author remains elusive and difficult to fully understand, uncovering his motivations reveals the intricate layers of his personality and creative impulse. When young Bowles wanted to be away from his parents, he found refuge with his grandparents on Happy Hollow Farm, in Massachusetts; it provided a completely different experience, highlighting a stark contrast to all he witnessed back home and in the city. What he loved most was the woods and the natural surroundings where he could wander at will among the maples. These early engagements with solitude and the natural world not only nurtured Bowles's sensitivity to place but also laid the foundation for his later philosophical reflections on multiplicity, truth, and the limits of selfhood. This sensitivity finds vivid resonance in his fiction, where the landscape functions as an active force that shapes his characters' psychological states and moral awareness. The natural environment is not a passive setting; it is rather integral to their inner conflicts and transformations, reflecting the study's central argument as to how one's surroundings profoundly influence consciousness and the search for meaning.

This philosophical awareness of space and consciousness is closely linked with Bowles's own contemplation on truth and identity, highlighting how his personal worldview reflects the multiplicity and moral ambiguity that distinguish his fiction. In her collection of interviews with Paul Bowles, Gina D. Caponi presents one of his statements: "There is a truth for everyone, and no one truth carries away all the others" (1993, p. 66), which unveils Bowles's liberal and free spirit and serves as evidence that he rejected

"any idea of a monopoly on the truth" (Hamdaoui, 2013, p. 3). Even though he once noted, "I don't want anyone to know about me. In the first place "I" don't exist" (Hamdaoui, 2013, p. 217), some facts are inevitably there to be discovered, such as the influence of Edgar Allan Poe and French existentialists on his childhood. Evidently an unassuming man yet also very modest when mentioning his achievements, saying that he had just written books and music, Bowles spent much of his adulthood as an expatriate in North Africa. This place shaped his character and deeply inspired his writing style, saturating it with a distinct viewpoint and an intense understanding of the region's culture, conflicts, and landscape.

Bowles regarded himself as uniquely qualified to describe Morocco with vivid imagery, a positive outcome of his settlement there, which granted him a wealth of knowledge to weave into his fiction, beautifying his narratives with genuine cultural and geographical pictures. His settlement in Morocco, where he would spend 52 years until the end of his life, is described as an escape from New York insinuated in his own words in an interview by Jeffrey Bailey: "I just think it's a great shame, what has happened there" (2016, n.p.). Patteson opines that Bowles's reflections on belonging and alienation, closure and openness, originating from the fabric of his own life, are imbued with outsidedness and rootlessness (1987, p. x). Again, in the same collection of interviews by Caponi, Bowles expressed that he would never have been a writer if he had stayed in the United States, as his contact with foreign places, especially Tangier, obviously nurtured his writing. With his creativity, he greatly harnessed the abundance of his Moroccan surroundings, not only focusing on human existence but also foregrounding the natural elements of expansive deserts by integrating them into much of his fiction, which is representative of something uniquely Moroccan (Lacey, 2009, p. 90). These unique experiences found distinct expressions in several of his works.

His novel *The Sheltering Sky* (1949) depicts the mentally and emotionally fractured characters Kit and Port in their adventure in Algeria, a continuing episode for the two self-destructive New Yorkers. Bowles skillfully crafts much of the novel in the bitter, unforgiving landscapes of North Africa, where the environment itself surfaces as a pivotal, almost overwhelming force, casting the characters' lives as contingent upon their emotional and psychological states. The desert, with its unbending heat, barren terrain, and colossal emptiness, is symbolic of Kit and Port's existential struggles. Their engagement with their surroundings is often marked by an exploration of the relationship between man and nature. This gestures toward the interplay and tension between human existence and the natural world. The Sahara Desert, the largest hot desert in the world, where nature exhibits all its extreme conditions, is not a decorative force meant to enrich the narrative but functions as a fundamental part of the characters' lives. Clearly, the relationship constructed between man and nature illustrates a multifaceted connection; one of both resistance and survival, endurance and reverence, not just a source to exploit. It is evident that there are examples of more symbiotic bonds between humans and their natural surroundings. The characters' experiences are significantly shaped by the jagged cliffs and hills as well as the dry air of the deserts, presenting a mystical influence on their existential struggles. The vast desert, with its extreme temperatures and isolation, seeming like an unbeatable adversary yet remaining aloof to human suffering, perfectly illustrates nature's formidable forces, which direct them to confront their limitations and face their fates. Based on this, the novel can be viewed as an exploration of how the depictions of the environment and the characters' inner worlds insightfully reflect broader ecological themes, particularly the multi-layered relationship between humanity and nature, making it a fitting subject for a Jungian ecopsychological analysis.

Beyond Ecocriticism: Ecopsychology Through a Jungian Lens

The term ecocriticism dates to William Rueckert's essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" (1978), but it has found its voice at the 1989 Western Literature Association meeting in Coeur d'Alene. Cheryll Glotfelty, a young attendee of this meeting, reinvigorated the term and encouraged its acceptance

to describe what was previously known as "the study of nature writing." In other words, "ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (1996, xviii). Her call was immediately seconded by Glen Love in his speech "Revaluing Nature: Toward an Ecological Literary Criticism" (1991). Since then, "ecocriticism" has achieved broad usage in academic contexts, and its adoption is now nearly universal (Branch & O'Grady, 1994, p. 1). In doing so, ecocriticism has so far entailed literature to engage with the environmental issues of today, focusing on both nature and the environment in literary analyses. However, it has also raised some doubts regarding its scope and how it would adequately cover the literary representations of the relationships between humans and nature. Glotfelty poses the question "What crossfertilization is possible between literary studies and environmental discourse in related disciplines such as history, philosophy, psychology, art history, and ethics?" to use ecocriticism as an interdisciplinary field (1996, pp. xviii-xix). Oppermann's elucidations serve as an answer to Glotfelty's question:

> From the literary standpoint ecocriticism needs a more inclusive and interdisciplinary approach…In fact any inquiry into ecological matters in literary theory necessitates the need for theoretical and critical specificity. (1999, p. 30)

Ecocriticism is actively evolving, constantly drawing from other disciplines to (re)shape or (re)define its scope. Oppermann's remark on the objective of ecocriticism is that it should not "be with obsolete representational models, but with how nature gets textualized in literary texts to create an eco-literary discourse that would *help produce an intertextual* as well as *an interactive approach between literary language and the language of nature*" (1999, p.32, italics mine). Thus, it creates a space to link ecocriticism with psychology in exploring how both the external environment and the internal landscape fashion human behavior and identity. This also aligns with ecocriticism's evolving nature as Jacques Lacan described psychoanalysis as "involved," yet still able to enrich itself. Considering the age-old argument of ecology, as Commoner states, "Everything is connected to everything else" (1971, p. 23), it posits that all elements are interconnected in an inseparable bond affecting and shaping one another, for better or for worse. Environmental conditions play a vital role in our mental state and vice versa. Cosimo Schinaia argues that "The environment surrounds us. We breathe it and depend on it. At the same time, the environment dwells inside of us, in our minds, dreams, conflicts, anguishes, and fears" (2022, p. 1), suggesting that a perfect exchange between the inside and the outside could be achieved through natural elements. Thus, nature can be defined as a doppelgänger of the human inner world in a symbolic or metaphorical sense. In its pursuit of a more comprehensive understanding, ecocriticism has woven together different disciplines to enhance its theoretical framework. The act of linking ecocriticism and psychology has brought about ecopsychology as a rich interdisciplinary approach, where we are enlightened on how psychology has begun to pay attention to ecological problems since the 1990s.

Ecopsychology is regarded as an evolving field of study that examines the keen relationship between humans' physical environment and mental well-being, and it is now recognized as interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary. Its major goal is to explain how our relationship with our environment affects our mental health and how rehabilitating these connections can result in psychological healing. Human existence extends beyond mere physical presence, as our psychology is intricately interwoven with an interconnected universal network. According to Roszak, the domains of psychology are largely confined to the realms of urban and industrial areas and social structures, but he underscores that humanity's disconnection from nature reveals the situation of how to unearth our "unconscious needs and desires, in much the same way we read dreams and hallucinations to learn about our deep motivations, fears, hatreds" (1995, p. 5). Thus, any damage to the biosphere or ecological balance and estrangement from nature can inevitably result in a disruption of both the conscious and unconscious mind, which forms the essence of why ecocriticism

should acknowledge human psychology. The center of ecopsychology is an investigation of the harmonious balance between human psychology and the external world, emphasizing the significance of an integrated relationship with nature for the maintenance of human mental well-being and sanity. This idea finds resonance in the words of Davis, "Ecopsychology is based on the recognition of a fundamental nonduality between humans and nature and on the insight that the failure to experience, value, and act from this nonduality creates suffering for both humans and the environment" (2011, p. 140). What it suggests is a heightened awareness of the need to live in harmony with this connection.

As one of the most influential figures in ecopsychology, Carl G. Jung's insight into the human psyche and its connection with nature stands out as a cornerstone for discovering the dynamics of this evolving discipline. His key proposal is to ally our present being with a "two-million-year-old man within" which is an "indigenous one within" (qtd. in Merritt, 2011, p. 8) because all these "indigenous cultures … considered all elements of the cosmos to be spiritually alive and interrelated" (qtd. in Merritt, 2011, p. 8). His greatest challenge lies in this question: "Do you think that somewhere we are not in nature, that we are different from nature? No, we are in nature, and we think exactly like nature" (Jung, 1988a, pp. 1276-1277). This suggests that human thought is regarded as an extension of nature itself.

To establish an ecopsychological lens for interpreting *The Sheltering Sky*, two essential aspects of Jung's ecopsychology surface: the connection between the human psyche and nature and the critique of modernity's alienation from the natural world. The connection between man and nature constitutes Jungian psychology, beginning with his primary concept of the archetypes and the collective unconscious. As Jung states, "the collective unconscious is the preconscious aspect of things on the 'animal' or the instinctual level of the psyche. Everything that is stated by the psyche is an expression of the nature of things, whereof man is a part" (1976a, p. 540). Therefore, to Jung, archetypes form man's most ancient connection with nature, significantly serving as unconscious instruments in our perception of, response to, and feeling about the world.

The inception of the concept of the collective unconscious derives from the "house-of-many-levels" dream (Bair, 2003, p. 177). Symbolizing a kind of diagram, the house, or the dream, contains many levels, each of which corresponds to a different layer of the human psyche. As Merritt notes, "consciousness rests atop layers of cultural history with a foundation of the primitive man bordering on an animal soul," suggesting an important ecopsychological aspect (2011, p. 23). Religions that predominantly shape cultures have been significantly affected by natural events or disasters, for instance, the bubonic Plague, ultimately conditioning how we perceive nature (along with our perception of body, sexuality, and opposite sex). Individuals internalize cultural values, in other words, the cultural dimensions of the collective unconscious, within their house-of-many-levels dreams. Considering the dual influence of the archetypal dimension of human experience, both its positive and negative effects, it is vital to examine the archetypal forces in culture to discover more about Jungian ecopsychology as they play a vital role in our connection with nature.

The finite energy of the unconscious, in other words, the creative force of nature residing within humankind, reveals the Self to a man who is closely engaged with it. The archetype of the Self is crucial to Jung's ecopsychology. It symbolizes the unified center of the psyche, with its utmost aim for the wholeness and integration of all aspects of the personality, and directs the process of individuation, fostering personal growth and self-realization. According to Jung, the Self can be defined as the archetypal representation of an organism, which functions with a guided purpose of resisting intrusion. Thus, this makes it an indivisible whole "involving the mutual implication of global and local, of part and whole, from moment to moment" (Ho, 1998, p. 55). What makes humans different from all other species is their capacity to consciously and emotionally experience the fundamental functions of the organism, which paves the path

for, to Jung, the process of individuation. As previously mentioned, Jung uses the organism and the cell to elucidate the multifaceted relationships that humans experience, the archetype of the Self and our connection to nature: "Life is a kind of unit ... trees cannot be without animals, nor animals without plants, and perhaps animals cannot be without man, and man cannot be without animals and plants—and so on" (1997, p. 753-754). These principles constitute the foundation of an ecopsychological outlook on humans' connection with nature. The comparison of the organism to the individual is similar to that of the cell that "performs only certain functions it has evolved to perform" (Merritt, p. 38). Based on Jung's accounts, "individuation, or the development of the Self, lies in the identification of Ego-consciousness with the Self" (1959, p. 145). Through individuation, one develops a profound understanding of their own uniqueness, simultaneously finding harmony between their individual identity and their relationship with the broader human community. That is, "the goal of the individuation process is the synthesis of the Self" (Jung, 1959, p. 164), which can be achieved through an awareness of one's capabilities and limits, and these can largely be realized in relation to other fellow beings. However, individualism is much "the vessel of life" or "the bearer of life" (Jung, 1977, p. 461) as it is akin to cancer cells because cancer emerges when cells disconnect from other cells. It is construed as a situation where one loses one's sense of connection with both other humans and nature, succumbing to a dangerous state that eventually results in a loss of self.

The concept of the Self is intricately connected to nature. Consciousness arises and recedes on a daily basis, going back to the unconscious, which Jung links with the body and nature. Like everything in nature is intertwined, so are all aspects of ourselves, and we are innately linked to others and our environment. Yet, this unity is not possible without facing what lies in opposition to it, the Shadow, as the most immediate expression of the collective unconscious, which embodies the instincts and desires that the ego resists integrating. In ecopsychological terms, repressing these instinctual elements signifies humanity's estrangement from nature. As Jung observes, "Whoever goes to himself risks a confrontation with himself... if we are able to see our own shadow and can bear knowing about it, then a small part of the problem has already been solved" (Jung, 1959, p. 20). Significantly, this synthesis entails the ego's conscious encounter with the Shadow, those repressed aspects of the personality whose integration renders wholeness possible. When the Shadow remains unacknowledged, the emergence of the Self is damaged, engendering alienation and fragmentation, conditions effectively illustrated in *The Sheltering Sky*'s desolate landscapes.

Drawing on the Jungian ecopsychological lens, this study explores the interconnectedness of humanity and nature through the Jungian concept of individuation, emphasizing the manifestation of the archetypes of the Self and the Shadow in *The Sheltering Sky*. Jung's argument that Eastern man diverges from Western man foregrounds the necessity of acknowledging one's own nature and the extent to which nature exists within the self. This study examines how the characters navigate the tension between their conscious (ego-driven) identities and the unconscious forces embodied by the Shadow, as they search for balance with their inner selves and the external world. Bowles's novel, in this regard, handles the conflict between individuality and collectivity, revealing how alienation from both others and nature can bring about a profound loss of soul and psychic wholeness.

Critical readings of *The Sheltering Sky* have often focused on its portrayals of travel, identity, and alienation but not through an ecopsychological or Jungian framework. Ya-Ju Yeh interprets the dialectic between external and internal landscapes, analyzing Bowles's desert as both a geographical and psychological space where "The desert is a real and imaginary geographical place which takes part in the process of identity of its pursuers" (2016, p. 336), underscoring how travel functions as a form of self-confrontation. On the other hand, Barry Tharaud outlines Bowles's philosophical lineage "from Emerson to Nietzsche to Gide to Bowles," highlighting how his existential sensibility remains "thoroughly in the American grain" (2020, p. xx). It is possible to conclude that these influences likely informed Bowles's depiction of existential tension

and his creation of a profound connection between his characters' inner lives and the vast natural settings they inhabit. Andrew Martino (2006), by contrast, reads the novel through a Heideggerian–existential and gendered perspective, approaching Kit's "dis-integration of female identity" as a psychological unraveling that mirrors the vastness and indifference of the desert. Sheikhzadeh and Bejarzehi, in "An Ecocritical Reading of Paul Bowles's *The Sheltering Sky*" (2017), visit the novel through an ecocritical lens, emphasizing the natural environment's influence on the characters' consciousness and treating the desert as a living, symbolic, and affective force that influences human desire and fear. Alexa Weik von Mossner's article "Encountering the Sahara: Embodiment, Emotion, and Material Agency in Paul Bowles's *The Sheltering Sky*" directly explores how the desert acts as a psychological and affective force: "The protagonists of *The Sheltering Sky* tend to understand the Sahara as an empty space, a screen onto which they can project their dreams, fears, and desires... The region's natural and cultural environment in fact possesses material agency, shaping the destinies of the protagonists..." (2013, p. 221). In the same vein, Sina Movaghati Kharazmi approaches the novel from a psychological and symbolic perspective, proposing that Bowles uses sand and time as "the two crucial elements which balance the protagonists' state of semi-consciousness in the inner journey of self" (2016, p. 41). The desert is interpreted not only as a setting but also as a psychic landscape, symbolizing the "emblem of unconsciousness in grains of sand," (Kharazmi, 2016, p. 46) where Port and Kit "trespass the bound of semi-consciousness to the realm of unknown" (Kharazmi, 2016, p. 48). However, their framework remains within postcolonial, existential, and psychological boundaries rather than the Jungian ecopsychology.

Collectively, these studies provide a landscape to recognize the desert's dual role as both a setting and a psychic mirror; however, they do not systematically address the archetypal dynamics of the Self, Shadow, integral to individuation, underscoring Bowles's psychological landscape of the desert. The present study departs from this body of work by offering a distinct perspective on Bowles's desert through the lens of Jung's ecopsychology, arguing that Port and Kit's alienation emanates from a ruptured connection between the psyche and nature. In doing so, it takes existing ecocritical and existential readings further, placing *The Sheltering Sky* within a broader dialogue between modern alienation, archetypal psychology, and ecological consciousness.

The Jungian Path to Discover the "Desert Within"

The unhappy couple, Port and Kit Moresby, who are revealed later in the narrative, arrive in North Africa shortly after World War II, in search of a clearer sense of self, perhaps a purpose in life. Considering the damage the World War brought upon the civilians, it was not customary to travel to Europe because of the unrest in the aftermath of the war; therefore, the exotic world became an escape ticket, "At this point they had crossed the Atlantic for the first time since 1939, with a great deal of luggage and the intention of keeping as far as possible from the places which had been touched by the war" (Bowles, 1949, p. 6). The very first paragraph presents Port's experience of awakening with the "infinite sadness at the core of his consciousness" (Bowles, 1949, p. 3). What deepens our understanding of human experience is the discovery of the Self, and Jung's advocacy of following the energy of the unconscious, the vastness of the creativity of nature within humans, takes one to this discovery, a life-transforming experience. Port's "infinite sadness" reflects two divergent but convergent journeys: first, the journey to that physical desert, and second, the journey to that spiritual desert. These journeys they embark on both promote personal development and motivate individuals to confront their inner nature, and this surely mirrors how their psyche pertains to broader ecological and collective experiences.

Jung explains that the collective unconscious functions as a repository of shared human experiences. Within the scope of ecopsychology, the concept demonstrates that our psychological states are intricately

affected by our environment, highlighting a collective trauma linked to ecological destruction. Kit and Port's trip is already doomed, which is foreshadowed at the very beginning, as they are struggling with an irredeemable existential crisis in the heart of the desolate landscape. The barren setting represents the Eastern wilderness and its otherness, symbolizing the Western vision of the East. The wilderness of the desert, unfathomable to their Western mindset, evokes unresolved trauma, whereas the cultural otherness in a foreign land aligns with the piercing otherness in nature; thus, both wilderness and otherness are entangled. This allusively reflects the emptiness at the core of their psyche. Related to Port and Kit's disconnection from their deeper selves, their alienation in the desert symbolizes human estrangement from nature, elucidating how modern man's detachment from nature, whether due to a world war or the new world design navigated by advanced technology, illustrates a collective trauma.

Given that the Self is defined as the archetype of wholeness, an image of the organism that forms an organized whole with an unshakable purpose, it leads to the achievement of individuation. Individuation is guided by the Self and produces images of wholeness, which are significant in setting the goals of one's life. With an intact wholeness comes an awakening toward the existential interrelationship. Port frequently experiences moments in which he becomes lost in his thoughts, wandering throughout the streets, "He walked through the streets, unthinkingly seeking the darker ones, glad to be alone and to feel the night air against his face" (Bowles, 1949, p. 14). The damaged interrelationship with others illustrates his fragmented self, not the whole, and is further deepened by the symbolic associative portrayal of the desert where he will lose more of his self. His solitary walking goes against the grain of conventional and triumphant self-discovery, pushing him to search for meaning in places and experiences, away from the urban area. Representative of the ego and conscious mind, the urban environment propels him into the desert, into his unconscious. As Jung states, a man can achieve wholeness only through the acceptance of the unconscious, as he asserts that "the ability to establish communications with the unconscious is a part of the whole man" (Freeman, 1964, p. 11). Based on this, the wind blowing over the barren mountains and the vast sebkha reflects a harbinger of transformation and a call to reconnect with nature to reach the inner self to heal. However, it signals the opposite, as the dust clouds rise to the hill and disappear, foreshadowing the gradual loss of control. This, in Jungian terms, signifies the ego's dissolution into the collective unconscious.

They venture deeper into the desert, an unknown natural realm, and the physical difficulties of the landscape become more synchronized with the intensifying emotional turbulence in their relationship with their psyche and with each other. As they approach Boussif, the conditions grow increasingly harsher, giving way to an overwhelming sense of uncertainty pressing heavily upon them. "Down from the cliff," the passage becomes hazardous, and "the view inland" appears "spectacular and hostile" (Bowles, 1949, p. 67). It is both "spectacular" and "hostile". This binary opposition surrounding the phenomena or marvels of nature is strongly endorsed by Edmund Burke's influential reflections in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), in which he explores the concepts of beauty and the sublime and links aesthetic experience to encounters with nature: "The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature, when those causes operate most powerfully, is astonishment ; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror" (1823, p. 73). This suggests that nature not only reflects human emotion but acts in an active, overwhelming way to evoke both admiration and dread. Burke's sublime, the tension between awe and terror, is reminiscent of Jung's idea of the Shadow, the confrontation with the immense, uncontrollable powers within the psyche typified by the vastness of the desert. Thus, the natural elements mirror the characters' inner turmoil while simultaneously confronting them with the uncanny, forces that are vast, obscure, and beyond human comprehension. This horror might be the outcome of a confrontation with an unfathomable power, which may either destroy or protect, depending on the nature of the relationship between a human being and their physical environment. In

his discussions of dreams, Jung proposes that "Consciousness naturally resists anything unconscious and unknown" (1964, p. 31). Thus, the characters' defiance of the unfamiliar and the unknown pushes them into a conflict with their own unconscious and repressed selves, underscoring the tension between what is consciously known and what is hidden in the psyche. This can also be further explained by M.-L. von Franz's accounts of the process of individuation:

> Strictly speaking, however, the process of individuation is real only if the individual is aware of it and consequently makes a living connection with it. We do not know whether the pine tree is aware of its own growth, whether it enjoys and suffers the different vicissitudes that shape it. But man certainly is able to participate consciously in his development. (1964, p. 162)

M.-L. von Franz, who worked closely with Jung, argues that individuation encompasses the individual's active involvement in the process of fusing the unconscious with the conscious aspects of the psyche. The convergence between Jung and von Franz's assertions is that individuation entails both the unconscious disclosure of the self and conscious awareness. The latter plays a crucial role in guiding the tensions and conflicts that surface throughout this pursuit. The desert serves as an arena where the characters encounter existential angst, which they have long suppressed, leading to pain and despair. The acute awareness of their own existence is the major reason, as Søren Kierkegaard notes, "With every increase in the degree of consciousness, and in proportion to that increase, the intensity of despair increases: the more consciousness, the more intense the despair" (1941, p. 44). Their confrontation with the desolate desert or unknown land becomes a core element of everyone's inner journey toward the Self, wholeness.

The barren mountains and dust evoke the archetypal realm where one must face the shadow, those parts of the self that are repressed or ignored. As Jung observes, "whoever goes to himself risks a confrontation with himself... but if we are able to see our own shadow and can bear knowing about it, then a small part of the problem has already been solved" (1959, p. 20). This inner confrontation finds an external counterpart in the moment when Port stands still while the wind is blowing "across the barren mountains" (Bowles, 1949, p. 17); it marks a pause where the journey inward begins, despite its apparent complications ahead. The external desert is intricately linked with the internal landscape of the self in ecopsychology; it is only by embracing this raw, primal energy that one can begin the process of individuation and move toward becoming a more complete, integrated self. This psychic fragmentation first appears in Port's dream of the speeding train, where he "snapped off [his] incisors as if they'd been made of plaster" and "started to sob" (Bowles, 1949, p. 10). The violent yet thrilled imagery symbolizes the ego's fragmentation under unconscious pressure, a symbolic death that precedes transformation. As Jung notes, the loss of teeth is emblematic of "a loss of grip," suggesting an impairment of one's control over reality or self-conception (1973, p. 212). Kit instinctively withdraws from the scene, repressing similar impulses, a harbinger of her later descent into psychological disintegration in the desert. This later surfaces in Kit's quiet scene of dissociation, where the desert's motionlessness reflects her internal withdrawal: "She sat drinking the tea, feeling that what she saw and heard around her was not really happening, or if it were, she was not really there herself" (Bowles, 1949, p. 122). The dim light and fading coals present a state between being awake and unconscious. According to Jung, this is when the ego starts to give in to deeper, unconscious forces, demonstrating that she is halfway through losing herself in the desert.

The existential search offers layers through which the characters attempt to comprehend their purpose: *whether* to restore their fragmented self *or* to embody a "go with the flow" state. The latter means surrendering to the aimlessness of their journey, as Port says, "We have no plans at all," reflecting a passive submission to the vast and indifferent expanse of the Sahara Desert. Similarly, Kit "was not conscious of time passing; on the contrary, she felt that it had stopped, that she had become a static thing suspended in a

vacuum" (Bowles, 1949, p. 78). Her wish to freeze time implies a disjunction between the self and reality; this hints at a psychological stasis, mirroring the lifeless desert around her. According to Jungian ecopsychology, such stillness and desolation demonstrate the inner emptiness that arises when consciousness loses its connection to nature. The desert emerges as a psychic landscape where dread, as Kierkegaard defines it, is both liberating and terrifying; it exposes the lack of external authority while forcing an encounter with the self's deepest freedom. Dread, as Kierkegaard writes, is "freedom's reality as the possibility for possibility" (1944, p. 38), emphasizing the paradox of awareness that both expands and destabilizes the self. This dread, according to the Jungian perspective, stands for the ego's first confrontation with the unconscious, as the essential psychic tension, a kind of fear and emptiness that "every natural human being experiences when it comes to delving too deeply into himself is, at bottom, the fear of the journey to Hades" (Jung, 1952, p. 336), subsequently driving inner renewal, or individuation. To further elaborate, Kierkegaard's dread is similar to Jung's idea of psychic conflict functioning as the catalyst for self-integration. Thus, Kit's experience is a profound yet disorienting awareness of freedom, dragging her into a psychological void where dread arises as both fear and possibility. This inner void mirrors the existential tension between consciousness and nature, and it reveals how the loss of external structure pushes one to confront one's own freedom. Port's rejection of external validation, as read in, "I'm not going to carry a passport to existence around with me, to prove I have the right to be here! I'm here! I'm in the world!" (Bowles, 1949, pp. 88–89) exemplifies this confrontation. His resistance to social and moral constructs, which define existence, finds an expression in Jung's idea of individuation, the struggle to live authentically by reconciling the inner self with the outer world. Both characters, through their encounters with the desert's emptiness, epitomize different responses to the same existential landscape, where dread serves as the catalyst for self-awareness and fuels the possibility of psychological renewal.

However, this process also necessitates existential isolation, which, for Kierkegaard, is essential so that individuals can define their own existence in a world devoid of inherent meaning. The desert, as the setting where Port and Kit experience isolation, mirrors Kierkegaard's notion of solitude as the necessary condition for self-realization. For Jung, however, individuation, in other words, self-realization, occurs not in detachment but in a dynamic balance between the personal and the collective unconscious. Jung explains that individuation is a state in which both collective and personal elements cooperate. Humans should not be absorbed by egocentric goals, for instance, just focusing on personal goals, nor consumed by the collective. They must live according to the values of the collective but maintain balance, since there may be the danger of neurotic, narcissistic alienation arising from a deep understanding of oneself and one's role in society. Port can see through collectivity if he examines the ways in which cultural influences have woven themselves into the psyche. As highlighted by Jung:

> The self is relatedness .... Individuation is only possible with people, through people. You must realize that you are a link in a chain, that you are not an electron suspended somewhere in space or aimlessly drifting through the cosmos. (1988, p. 795)

In addition, individuation is contingent upon relationships with others, as Jung maintains, "The aim of individuation is nothing less than to divest the self of the false wrappings of the persona on the one hand and the suggestive power of primordial images on the other" (1966, p. 174). The ultimate goal of individuation, to become a whole, can be achieved by removing the social mask and accepting our true inner self. Individuation entails being aware of the primordial images (archetypes), which are also defined as unconscious and universal symbols (such as the Hero, Shadow, etc.) that shape our perception and behaviors. In a nutshell, the ultimate acquisition is a more authentic and integrated self. The fact that the ends of the Boussif's streets appear as "the bare wasteland" sloping "slowly upward to the base of the mountains, which were raw,

savage rock without vegetation" (Bowles, 1949, p. 84) foreshadows the forthcoming events the characters will encounter as they go deeper into the desert. These experiences, if seized appropriately, enable them to become fully themselves and reconcile their inner opposites (the ego and the shadow). This is the goal of individuation; to become whole, which is represented by the Self, the central archetype.

Jung observes that our primary problem is the loss of a healthy relationship with the archetypal dimension, and with it, a sense of the sacred and spirituality that nature grants. The modern world has eradicated the experience of a spiritual bond with nature: "Man feels himself isolated in the cosmos. He is no longer involved in nature and has lost his emotional participation" (Jung, 1976, p. 585). He admonishes humanity against the restless use of free will to turn a blind eye to nature within us as explained by the autonomous archetypes we put at risk "a certain dissociation, i.e., a loss of vitality, what the primitives call 'loss of soul'" (Jung, 1976, p. 626). Drawing on these accounts, Port is absorbed by the solitude of the desert, searching for a connection to something infinite, whereas Kit is terrified by this emptiness since she still adheres to the comforts of human relationships, and the meaning derived from collective values: "And although he was aware that the very silences and emptinesses that touched his soul terrified her" (Bowles, 1949, p. 93). The setting provides a moment of real self-discovery that can be attained by confronting the vastness and silence within themselves, resonating with Jung's argument that modern man should maintain emotional engagement with nature to eliminate spiritual dissociation and the loss of soul.

It is observed that the crisis is anchored in Kit and Port's disconnection from time and meaning, echoing Jung's accounts of losing touch with the Self. This is reinforced in Bou Noura, where they grow increasingly distant from each other. Port discovers that his passport is missing, suggesting that he is on the verge of losing his identity. A form of irremediable detachment from his soul is hinted at when he chooses not to look at his surroundings or the sky to find a way out:

> He did not look up because he knew how senseless the landscape would appear... He did not want to face the intense sky, too blue to be real, above his head, the ribbed pink canyon walls that lay on all sides in the distance, the pyramidal town itself on its rocks, or the dark spots of oasis below. They were there, and they should have pleased his eye, but he did not have the strength to relate them, either to each other or to himself, he could not bring them into any focus beyond the visual. (Bowles, 1949, p. 154)

E. O. Wilson has offered the concept of "biophilia," meaning "the innately emotional affiliation of human beings to other living organisms" (1993, p. 31). Psychologists note that biophilia is intricately linked to "biophobia," suggesting both love and fear of nature, interpreted as awe, devotion, and respect, ultimately entailing a reconsideration of our connection with the natural world. Theodore Roszak states, "ecopsychology might be seen as a commitment by psychologists and therapists to the hope that the biophilia hypothesis will prove true and so become an integral part of what we take mental health to be" (1995, p. 4). This instinctive connection echoes Jung's conception of individuation, but its severance impairs the emergence of the Self, giving rise to psychic fragmentation and alienation. Thus, Port's ego's dissociation from the external world can be explored as a psychological process culminating in alienation and, moreover, in potential pathological behaviors. This resonates with Wilson's biophilia hypothesis, which proposes an innate emotional bond between humans and other living organisms. He notes that it is essential to maintain an enduring relationship with nature for human well-being, whereas Port is observed to withdraw from such a connection, leading to a distorted sense of bond with the natural world. Roszak points out that psychological health intricately depends on this connection, and any sort of detachment from the natural world will eventually result in mental and emotional imbalance. Healing, therefore, is only possible through the rehabilitation of humanity's lost connection to nature.

Port's sickness deteriorates while travelling further into the desert, toward the city of El Ga'a, simultaneously deepening the conflict between them as their quarrels become more frequent. The worse he gets, the more the external world personifies his inner world: "The canyon walls were black now, the scattered clumps of palms had become invisible... The rocks and the sky were everywhere, ready to absolve him, but as always; he carried the obstacle within him" (Bowles, 1949, p. 162). This reflects Port's profound inner struggle, resonating with his physical sickness. His internal barrier makes him see the world as an obstacle with which he is unable to connect, a disconnection likely rooted in his unresolved past experiences, as suggested by the mention of something he "ate ten years ago" (Bowles, 1949, p. 162). His past experiences continue to shape his current perception; therefore, the natural elements fail to heal him but instead serve as the embodiment of the unyielding darkness within his inner world.

Port eventually dies in Sbâ from the typhoid and is abandoned there to decay by Kit. Tunner, in turn, develops a hatred for the desert as it has taken away his friends: "The desert—its very silence was like a tacit admission of the half-conscious presence it harbored" (Bowles, 1949, p. 245). This suggests something unspoken, reflecting an inner emptiness. However, the desert is not an empty space but harbors a powerful energy and silence that represent the unconscious, shaping one's inner world. According to Jung, humans have relinquished their connection to and integrity with nature in the process of attaining ego-consciousness, which is the role of the conscious mind in self-awareness and identity formation. This abandonment, therefore, leads to the emergence of psychological and spiritual sickness:

> If we reduced humanity as it then was to a single individual, we would see before us a highly differentiated personality who, after mastering his environment with sublime self-assurance, split himself up in the pursuit of his separate occupations and interests, forgetting his own origins and traditions, and even losing all memory of his former self, so that he seemed to be now one thing and now another, and thus fell into a hopeless conflict with himself. (1970, p. 141)

Thus, humanity will face devastating consequences unless it restores connection with both its inner and external nature. In "The Meaning of Psychology for Modern Man," (1970) Jung's use of natural metaphors such as "sea, island, storm, shore" or "inland" illustrates the demarcation between the conscious and unconscious realms, showing the correspondence between the psyche and nature. He suggests that the psyche can best be understood through natural imagery. Despite this, humans recklessly continue to destroy nature, a self-destructive act, as Jung defines it since humanity depends on nature for its very existence. This idea can be illustrated by Kit's failure to reconcile her experiences, leading to her progressive psychological downfall. Running into the desert, instead of home, Kit becomes a figure of total detachment, both mentally and emotionally. She stands in the midst of the desert, and metaphorically, her life itself transforms into a desert. Her personal fall exemplifies how humanity's disconnection from and harm to nature mirror the destructive effects on the essential foundations of existence, whether psychological or environmental. She is repeatedly raped, and instead of resisting, she experiences a disturbing sense of acceptance, while the narrative unfolds amid the rising and falling sand dunes of the Sahara Desert. This suggests that the mood of the novel grows increasingly oppressive and heavy, reflecting Kit's irrational and fragmented state of mind. She feels trapped in a liminal state of disorientation and existential confusion. The fear of psychological death and the crisis of stagnation are depicted through her repetitive, unchanging surroundings, resembling a limbo state, as she joins a caravan of Arab men. Jungian theory emphasizes the necessity of confronting and integrating the shadow, the unconscious parts of the self, with the persona to achieve a balanced psyche and healthy psychological growth; it is the path to self-awareness. Understanding one's shadow is a central aspect of individuation. However, the characters avoid this confrontation, seeking to protect themselves from what

they fear most, the all-encompassing power of nature. Yet, Jung's theory also proposes that psychological growth through confrontation fosters a strong bond with nature.

The tone of the novel darkens when Kit is held captive by Belqassim and violently abused by other members of the household. She ultimately ends up in a convent hospital, nearly insane. Her disappearance at the end of the novel can be interpreted through Jung's argument of the psyche's dissolution into the natural world, the desert. She succumbs to the vast and powerful, perhaps nonchalant, landscape rather than returning to her former life. She is apparently undergoing an irrevocable trauma, triggered by an existential crisis, and her internal breakdown leads to her disintegration from her surroundings. She represents individuals who have lost contact with nature and thus have been consumed by it. Just as modern man destroys the environment despite depending on it, Kit's identity dissolves into the desert, resulting in psychic fragmentation: "The pure sky, the bushes beside her, the pebbles at her feet, all had been drawn up from the well of absolute night... she had no feeling of being anywhere, of being anyone" (Bowles, 1949, p. 294). The quoted passage illustrates how Kit merges with her surroundings and loses her sense of identity, as well as the distinction between her inner world and the external one. In Jungian psychology, this kind of experience means that the mind has fully given in to the unconscious, so the boundaries of the self disappear into the vastness of nature. The desert, then, is not just depicted as a physical place but also represents the collective unconscious, a symbolic realm in which individual identity and awareness are absorbed by the larger forces of existence (and nature). As Jung remarks, "The only real danger that exists is man himself... We are the origin of all coming evil" (1977, p. 436). Kit's ultimate downfall illustrates Jung's point that the real danger lies within the human psyche.

Conclusion

The environmental crisis necessitates a deeper exploration of the human psyche and a corresponding commitment to action based on what both science and self-reflection teach us. This study serves as an example of such an exploration. It examines the profound intersection between Jungian ecopsychology, particularly the archetypes of the Self and the process of individuation, and Paul Bowles's *The Sheltering Sky,* reflecting on the psychological effects of nature on human existence. The desert in the novel functions as both literal and symbolic space, providing a landscape to analyze how the narrative reveals the interplay between the characters' inner turmoil and their ensuing existential crisis; how their detachment from nature and inability to bond with it deepen internal conflicts; and how the natural environment mirrors humanity's fears and desires related to the void within their inner landscape. Port and Kit's journey deeper into the desert represents their confrontation with the unconscious and the untamed forces of nature, both restorative and destructive.

Bowles's desert suggests that disintegration from nature and the psyche causes irreversible psychological damage. Moreover, the emotional collapse seen in Kit's tragic end illustrates humanity's greatest problem, the loss of the relationship with the archetypal domain. The wholeness achieved through the central archetype of the Self reflects the potential to become a member of the whole, culminating in a oneness of being, on his/her account and of all. The whole person is realized through the process of individuation, which enables one to define one's unique nature and develop a healthy relationship with the unconscious. Individuation is strengthened through a balanced connection with oneself and with others. This demonstrates that all aspects of our being are interconnected, just as everything in nature is. Therefore, a bond with nature signifies the wholeness of the Self, a fundamental element of the psyche and a core concept in Jungian ecopsychology, underscoring the significance of harmonizing the self with both the natural world and inner psyche. However, Port and Kit fail to reconcile with nature, becoming entangled in

their isolation and existential crisis, and they fail to realize that the emptiness is not confined to the external world but resides within, perpetually hunting the self.

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