




SYMBOLIC AND AFFECTIVE DIMENSIONS OF HUMAN-ANIMAL RELATIONSHIPS IN ANURADHA ROY'S *THE EARTHSPINNER*

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ABSTRACT: *The Earthspinner* (2021) is a multi-layered work in which the dog Chinna acts as an emotional link between all the characters. This paper aims to examine the novel through the lens of affective ecocriticism, focusing on how Roy relates imagery of fire, water and earth to emotions of loss, longing and hatred in the novel. Following a polyhedral analysis, I have chosen to focus on the lives, vicissitudes and misadventures of the novel's three main characters, paying attention to the affections that move and guide their lives and to the different axes around which Anuradha Roy has constructed this novel. Finally, and given the symbolic richness of *The Earthspinner*, I will offer a global hermeneutic analysis along with the final conclusions.

KEYWORDS: affective ecocriticism, symbolism, *The Earthspinner*, myth and tradition, human-animals relations

Dimensiones simbólicas y afectivas de las relaciones entre humanos y animales en *The Earthspinner*, de Anuradha Roy

RESUMEN: *The Earthspinner* (2021) es una obra con múltiples aristas en la que el perro Chinna actúa como vínculo emocional entre todos los personajes. Este artículo pretende examinar la novela a través de la perspectiva de la ecocrítica afectiva, centrándome en cómo Roy relaciona las imágenes del fuego, el agua y la tierra con las emociones de pérdida, añoranza y odio en la novela. A partir de un análisis poliédrico, me centro en las vidas, vicisitudes y desventuras de los tres personajes principales de la novela, atendiendo a los afectos que mueven y guían sus vidas y a los distintos ejes en torno a los cuales Anuradha Roy ha construido esta novela. Por último, y dada la riqueza simbólica de la obra, ofrezco un análisis hermenéutico global junto con las conclusiones finales.

PALABRAS CLAVE: ecocrítica afectiva, simbolismo, *The Earthspinner*, mito y tradición, relaciones humano-animales

Dimensions symboliques et affectives des relations homme-animal dans *The Earthspinner*
d'Anuradha Roy

RÉSUMÉ : *The Earthspinner* (2021) est une œuvre à plusieurs niveaux dans laquelle le chien Chinna sert de lien émotionnel entre tous les personnages. Cet article vise à examiner le roman à travers le prisme de l'écocritique affective, en se concentrant sur la façon dont Roy associe l'imagerie du feu, l'eau et de la terre aux émotions de perte, de désir et de haine dans le roman. En suivant une analyse polyédrique, j'ai choisi de me concentrer sur les vies, les vicissitudes et les mésaventures des trois personnages principaux du roman, en prêtant attention aux affections qui meuvent et guident leurs vies et aux différents axes autour desquels Anuradha Roy a construit ce roman. Enfin, étant donné la richesse symbolique de *The Earthspinner*, je proposerai une analyse herméneutique globale ainsi que les conclusions finales.

MOTS-CLÉS : écocritique affective, symbolisme, *The Earthspinner*, mythe et tradition, relations homme-animal

Emotions create memories and drive
behaviour (Weik von Mossner, 2020, p. 133).

1. INTRODUCTION

Anuradha Roy's fiction is primarily concerned with human vulnerability, the impact of social and political change, and the intersection of class, caste and gender in contemporary India. She creates vivid characters whose life stories often touch on various manifestations of social injustice. As a committed writer, moreover, Roy explores the complexities of the human condition by examining emotions as diverse as love, nostalgia, and loss and social issues such as hypocrisy, sexual harassment, cruelty and violence. In *The Earthspinner* (2021), her fifth novel, however, it is a dog rather than a human who becomes the core or nexus through which all the characters are connected.

Set over five years between India and England in the midst of the late 1970s and early 1980s, *The Earthspinner* is a multi-layered work about myth, history and memory. Besides, the novel also explores the art of pottery and the creative process, love across religions, and loss and longing in relation to the concept of "home" through three main characters: Sara, Elango and Chinna. The novel contains diaries and letters, begins in a confessional and intimate tone with a first-person narrative and then switches between the third and first narrative voice throughout the novel. It is about the creative act and the essence of being an artist, about the risk of going against the establishment and the impossibility of loving someone because he or she belongs to a different religion in eternal conflict with the other. However, *The Earthspinner* is neither a historical nor a romantic novel, neither mythological nor dreamlike, neither religious nor artistic. It is all these things and more, because in this

work Roy questions the arbitrariness of political, economic, social, religious, cultural, and racial and gender boundaries.

Already in the epigraph to the novel, we find what will be one of the essential meanings of this work. Roy quotes a text by Kabir Das, the 15th century mystic poet who is credited with being the first person to reconcile Hinduism and Islam. The quote reads “I’m bowl / And I’m platter / I’m man / And I’m woman... / I’m Hindu / And I’m Muslim / I’m fish / And I’m net / I’m fisherman / And I’m time / I’m nothing / Says Kabir/I’m not among the living / Or the dead.”¹ This quote seems to suggest that not only are categories and labels unimportant, but that we are not so different after all. The most important message, however, is that such differences are complementary. They add rather than subtract. Through their different life experiences, encounters and misunderstandings, the characters in this novel will illustrate the certainty of this epigraph.

This paper aims to examine the novel through the lens of affective ecocriticism, paying particular attention to how Roy relates imagery of fire and earth to emotions of loss, longing and hatred in the novel, with a particular focus on how “place shapes the emotional lives” of the characters (Bladow & Ladino, 2018, p. 2). I will also address issues of social justice and non-human animals in environmental ethics. *The Earthspinner* is a novel characterised by its diversity of stories and themes, by its kaleidoscopic character in which several narratives, with their respective structures, intermingle and develop in a convergent, but also antagonistic way, constituting a dialectal interplay. I argue that the best way to understand the nature of this novel is to imagine a polyhedron,² which, despite its different sides, forms a coherent whole. For ease of this polyhedral analysis, I have chosen to focus on the lives, vicissitudes and misadventures of the novel’s three main characters, paying attention to the affections that move and guide their lives and to the different axes on which Anuradha Roy has constructed this novel. Finally, and given the symbolic richness of *The Earthspinner*, I will offer a global hermeneutic analysis along with the final conclusions.

2. *THE EARTHSPINNER* UNDER THE LENS OF AFFECTIVE ECOCRITICISM

Affective ecocriticism emerged in the early 21st century as a new level of understanding within the broader field of ecocriticism, which has traditionally emphasized more rational and intellectual approaches to environmental literature.³ By exploring the intersections between

¹ The translation from Hindi to English is by Arving Krishna Mehrotra, as indicated by Anuradha Roy in the epigraph of *The Earthspinner*. For further information about Kabir Das, see Dhakde’s article (2022).

² Pestano Fariña (2013, p. 11) uses the term “polyhedral” to refer to the theatrical mechanism in which elements of different kinds come together and progress hand in hand with the dramatic play in the space and time shared by the users of the stage and its spectators. In light of the nature of this novel, I believe this term can also be applied to it.

³ For further information, see Gregg & Seigworth (2010).

affect theory and environmental discourse, affective ecocriticism seeks to understand the emotional and psychological dimensions of human relationships with the natural world. Put differently, any relationship we have with the place we inhabit is always charged with emotion, either positive or negative, but never neutral. It is also interesting to note what one of the undisputed indirect precursors of affective ecocriticism, the cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, commented in the 1970s in his work *Topophilia* (1974). In his view, despite the fact that as a human society we are constrained to see things in a certain way, each individual sees reality differently, and, consequently, no human group will offer the same evaluation of a place, not to mention cultural, class, racial and gender perceptions (Tuan, 1990, p. 5).

Furthermore, in affective studies, the body plays a crucial role in generating emotional responses to the environment. As Bladow and Ladino assert, “Bodies, human and non-human, are [...] the most salient sites at which affect and ecocriticism come together” (2018, p. 3). Bodily emotional responses can range from joy, awe, and love for the environment to grief, fear and anger at environmental degradation. Non-human animals, moreover, offer an important role for affective ecocriticism in challenging anthropocentric views of the natural world. In this framework, animals are not seen as passive objects for human use or benefit, but as active participants in their own lives and environments. Affective ecocriticism thus emphasises the interconnectedness of all living beings, breaking down the barriers between humans and the rest of the natural world.

In the following section, the concepts of nostalgia, homesickness, longing and loss will be analysed through the prism of affect and their relation to the sense of place. I will also examine their relationship in the novel to the symbolism of the elements of earth, water and fire. Starting with the character of Sara, the first narrative voice who also plays the role of a homodiegetic narrator, I will continue with Elango, the third person second narrative voice and end with Chinna, the dog who acts as a link between all the characters. Therefore, although alluding the other characters when necessary, I will base my analysis mainly on the study of these three protagonists.

2.1. Nostalgia’s Embrace. The Ache of Homesickness, Longing and Loss in *The Earthspinner* Through Aara’s Voice

The Earthspinner begins *in medias res* with a diary entry written by Sara, a young Indian woman studying in England on a scholarship, who from the outset speaks of her lack of attachment to the place where she finds herself. Sara is acutely aware of all the cultural and geographical contrasts she encounters at every turn precisely because she fails to integrate this new landscape into her life. She is also the character who introduces the reader to the various interwoven stories told in the novel, and through her Roy explores the concept of home in relation to the issues of memory and nostalgia, longing and loss.

Over the course of five years, the lives of the main characters are radically transformed, reinforcing the sense of constant movement and transformation in life that the title of the novel suggests. The etymology of the word “emotion” is linked to this idea of movement. It

comes from the Latin word *emouere*, which means, “to move from”. In this sense, the feminist writer Sara Ahmed explains that “emotions can move through the movement or circulation of objects. Such objects become sticky, or saturated with affect, as sites of personal and social tension” (2004, p. 11). However, as Ahmed also notes, emotions are not only about movement but also about attachments: “What moves us, what makes us feel, is also that which holds us in place, or gives us a dwelling place” (2004, p. 11).

What factors do we need to feel at home? Sara misses her family, her culture and her customs. In England, her features and colour, the smell of her food, her accent, together with an introverted and somewhat shy personality, prevent her from integrating and establishing a fluid relationship with the other students, with the exception of Karin Wang, a Chinese elite athlete, with whom she establishes a certain friendship. In fact, it is because of this lack of integration and breathless loneliness that Sara suffers, that she longs for what she has left behind and that makes her feel loss and homesickness as never before.

As Jones (2005) argues, and as the novel under analysis proves, “life is inherently spatial and inherently emotional [...]. Emotions are systematic and interact constantly with our conscious and unconscious selves, memories and environment” (2005, p. 205). In this vein, it can be observed how Sara feels dislocated and the sense of uprootedness that affects her emotions is directly related to the space she occupies. In other words, her emotional landscapes and geographies map her mind. She is physically in England but her head is in India. “I’ve never known autumn,” Sara writes in her diary. “Where I grew up, the monsoon cooled into a mild winter that the trees did not think it worth changing color for and in a matter of days it went straight to the infernos of summer” (Roy, 2021, p. 9). Moreover, the West is for her a symbol of opulence, a chance to enjoy a range of luxuries that she is not accustomed to in her country. Even the tranquillity of everyday life assaults her: “Where I come from,” Sara says, “we have always known that ordinary days can explode without warning, leaving us broken, collecting the scattered pieces of our lives, no clear idea how to start again” (Roy, 2021, p. 28). Sara’s constant sense of estrangement produces in her a suffocating homesickness and longing for her loved ones, exacerbated by the difficulties in communicating with her mother due to the austerity of her scholarship. The need to contact her mother is such that it is enough to feel her on the other end of the phone for a few seconds: “For the time it takes to breathe one breath, we are together, at two ends of a fine string across continents and oceans” (Roy, 2021, p. 13).

Jones (2005), echoing the words of the famous neurophysiologist Antonio Damasio, also claims that we cannot control memory and the way in which our experiences are retained or not. Memory, moreover, “is not just a retrieval from the past or of the past, it is always a fresh, new creation where memories are retrieved into the conscious realm and something new is created” (2005, p. 208). Sara finds the opportunity to recreate her memories from India in a pottery studio that she is allowed to attend as a student. This studio becomes her refuge to alleviate the effects of daily homesickness; a place where she can develop her creativity and relive the happy moments she experienced in India when Elango taught her to work with ceramics. In these moments of creativity, as can be seen in the following quotation, she is in

control of her world: “The wheel turns, I place a ball of clay on it, I cover the clay with both my hands, and if I close my eyes I have the planet spinning in my palms to the hum of a motor” (Roy, 2021, p. 14). In other words, she becomes the Earthspinner. Pottery then turns into that which nourishes Sara and what binds her to her place and memories.⁴ She recounts how on occasions of extreme loneliness she would enter the studio simply to touch and smell the clay: “I come in [to the pottery studio], even if briefly, for the touch and scent of damp, pliable earth which I need as other people need food and water” (Roy, 2021, p. 24). It is precisely the smell of clay what makes her travel “through improbable stretches of time and space” to India (Roy, 2021, p. 25). This sensory encounter evokes strong emotional responses in her, fostering a sense of place. In other words, “emotions are relational” (Ahmed, 2004, p. 4). Sara learns what home means for her when she moves away from it, when she reflects upon it from a distance.

The concept of home is also explored in the novel through its association with loss. Sara needs to reassemble herself after the death of her father (Roy, 2021, p. 18). Being in London brings back memories of suffering, loss, and helplessness. The geographical distance and the nostalgia that she feels help her to seek relief, even forgiveness, as her father’s death is also associated with feelings of guilt and remorse. After his death, she goes into a loop, recalling the days when he wanted to talk to her and she preferred being with her friends. As Bondi et al. note “whether joyful, heart-breaking or numbing, emotion has the power to transform the shape of our lives, expanding or contracting our horizons, creating new fissures or fixtures we never expected to find” (2005, p.1). In this way, it can be seen how Sara will never be the same person after the loss of her father. When he is gone, leaving her with a pending conversation, she becomes conscious that there are moments and opportunities in life that will never come again and that will make her a different person, much more aware of the transience of life, but also of what home means to her.

One of the high points of the novel in which Sara becomes more aware of her lack of social integration in England and how her racial features make a difference is the moment when she suffers a racist attack on the way back to the residence when she stays. All the students had gone home to spend the holidays with their families, but Sara could not afford a return ticket to India, so she is obliged to stay. To counteract the feeling of homesickness that was overwhelming her, she decided to buy some Indian food to try to recreate the flavours of her country. On her way back, she is attacked by a man:

The shop was warm and bright with lights and chatter. Reshma at the till opened a stainless-steel box and offered me kababs. She grinned and said, “Memories of home, eh, now that college is empty?” [...]. I filled my basket, paid and left [...], my mind occupied with menus for myself. I was walking on the pavement between the shop and the petrol station on the corner when the thickset blond man who had been paying for beer ahead of me at the shop went past on his bicycle. As he passed, he slowed down and punched me hard on my shoulder. “*Fucking cunt, your curry stinks!*” he shouted. *He emptied the last of the beer from his can over my*

⁴ According to Sedikides et al., nostalgia may “spark inspiration, and foster creativity” (2008, p. 306).

head, tossed the can onto the pavement and cycled off thrusting a middle finger into the air (Roy, 2021, p. 211; my emphasis).

At this moment, Sara finds herself, without expecting it and without provoking it, immersed in a socio-spatial dynamic of otherness that Sibley describes as a “geography of exclusion” (2015). This experience will temporarily remove her, mentally and emotionally, from the space in which she finds herself paralysing her with fear. Ahmed explains that the state of emotional blockage related to hate “involves movement and fixity”. In other words, “some bodies move precisely by sealing others as objects of hate” (2004, p. 60). When a person is rejected and hated by another on the basis of race, the victim becomes a stranger, a “body out of place” (Ahmed, 2000, p. 15). After this racist incident, Sara wants more than ever to feel the warmth of a home: “I want to be at home, home as it used to be when my father was alive, when my mother was strong, when Elango was down the road” (Roy, 2021, p. 214). England is then described by Sara as a country that has many facilities, but from which she cannot help feeling excluded.

2.2. Elemental Threads: Fire, Earth and Water. The Essence of Elango’s Journey

Through Elango, the second protagonist, Roy introduces us to other fundamental themes in the novel such as mythology, the world of dreams, religious fanaticism and the symbolism of earth, fire and water. His story begins with a dream of a burning horse:

A horse was in flames. It roamed beneath the ocean breathing fire and when it shook its mane the flames coloured the waves red and when it erupted from the water it was as tall as a tree and the fire made the crackling sound of paper. It towered above the low-roofed house Elango lived in. The flames were at the hooves, the long solid cannons, and as they reached the muzzle, he worried that the horse would burst from the heat (2021, pp. 35-36).

This recurring dream has such an impact on his life that the next day he begins to turn it into reality. Elango lives and works in Kummarapet, that is, in the village of the *kummaras*, the potters (Roy, 2021, p. 36). His ancestors built these sacred horses once a year and dedicated them to the sons of Shiva in order to feel protected “from illness, bandits, evil” (Roy, 2021, p. 81). In Kummarapet, in a small scrubland with a pond and a dead tree he makes pots and terracotta urns, which he then tries to sell in order to survive, as his ancestors did. Elango is the embodiment of the true artist who believes in art as a way of life, not as a means of making money. He is talented, but he does not want to prostitute his art for profit and enrichment. On the contrary, he believes in what he does and in a kind of art that is accessible to all social classes. Obviously, he has to find other jobs to support himself.

The novel is set in a time of transition of which he is well aware: “When this wasteland too was given over to a landlord, his pond and its surrounding soil would be gone and with it his clay—[Elango] knew this as the future” (Roy, 2021, p. 36). An image of the future that

comes true at the end of the novel. The horse of his dream also has mythological overtones. He sees it emerging as “an earthen fountain” and is clear that he will not be satisfied until “it did not match this dream animal” (Roy, 2021, p. 38). Symbolically, the horse represents desire and instinct and is present in many ancient rites. It is also an image of fertility and sexuality, as explained by O’Flaherty (1971, p. 15). In the novel, however, although this horse alludes to different meanings, the main one is that it represents his love for Zohra, a Muslim girl with whom he has fallen in love. Zohra lives in Moti Block with her grandfather, a blind calligrapher of some repute. From the start, their love is a forbidden one because Elango is Hindu. Elango is aware that “the space between the two was a charnel house of burnt and bloodied human flesh, a giant crack through the earth that was like an open mouth waiting to swallow him (Roy, 2021, p. 44). Yet his passion for her transcends any risk and equally strong is his passion to create the terracotta horse of his dream.

The unbridled passion that Elango feels for Zohra and his art is represented in the novel by the element of fire. The symbol of fire is often associated with various states such as transformation and renewal, purification and cleansing, destruction and creation, passion and desire, enlightenment and knowledge or divine presence. In *The Earthspinner*, fire is particularly represented as an agent of transformation and as a symbol of passion and destruction. Because fire burns with constant intensity, passion is often described as a “burning desire” for something or someone, an emotion that Roy associates with the myth of Lord Shiva in *The Earthspinner*: “Lord Shiva’s passions had begun burning up the universe. To calm him and to save the earth, the gods placed his fires in a mare’s mouth, then took the mare to the ocean” (Roy, 2021, p. 46).

However, as noted in the previous quotation, in the myth of Shiva the element of fire is also associated with the ocean. Elsewhere in the novel, the horse is also described as being underwater: “His submarine horse had come to him again during the night, wandering below the water of the pond as tongues of fire flowed from its nostrils. It was time for it to rise and shake the water off its mane and back” (Roy, 2021, p. 79). According to O’Flaherty, the combination of these two opposing symbolical elements is of particular significance in India, especially in Shiva myth. As she points out, “the image of fire in water is the ultimate resolution of oppositions; held in suspended union, each retains its full power and nothing is lost in compromise, but there is complete balance” (1971, p. 9). Thus, unlike in Western thought, where water extinguishes fire, in India, and especially in this myth, such a combination results in the burning up of the water. That is to say, “fire and water express the related appetites of hunger and desire, and are mutually productive” (O’Flaherty, 1971, p. 11). With Sara’s help, then a girl living in India, Elango fulfils his dream of making a terracotta horse. They meet at the pond, located on the outskirts of Kummarapet, in the bushes next to a leafless tree, “once struck by lightning” (Roy, 2021, p. 80).

As Elango creates the horse, his love for Zohra grows stronger. These two characters belong to the group of the unwanted—Zohra is lame after an altercation she suffered as a child in a riot provoked by fanatics in which her parents were killed, and Elango is a very poor craftsman who has to work hard to make a living; however, there are no boundaries between

them. The boundaries are built by others, by the outside world, and soon, thanks to the manipulation of Akkha and her assistant Taatha, what was a secret, the love Elango and Zohra feel for each other, becomes an open secret. Akka and Taatha are the two most sinister characters in *The Earthspinner* and both are central to the outcome of the novel and to Elango's personal symbolic journey of transformation. Akka is the neighbourhood witch, the person who prepares potions for those who oppose her interests. She has cultivated a close relationship with the priests, knowing that it is in her best interest to gain power. Taatha, on the other hand, represents land speculation and the defence of capitalism in the novel. He is always on the lookout for any economic or social weakness in his neighbours to persuade them to sell their house and give up their land, so that he can continue to redevelop the village city with large buildings that cover the greenery of the old gardens. Generation after generation, Taatha has appropriated Kummarapet's land and transformed the landscape in the pursuit of property speculation. As the novel says, "Where Taatha came, change followed. Heaps of sand or bricks arrived, land was dug up and new houses sprouted" (Roy, 2021, p. 107). It is also in Tatha's interest to ally himself with Akkha, for he has long coveted the old house with the large courtyard with a moringa tree where Elango lives in poverty with his brother and wife.

When the horse is almost finished, Elango asks Zohra's grandfather, the blind calligrapher, to carve verses in Urdu on it. He wants it to be an eloquent horse, one that integrates not only Hindu but also Muslim culture, that is, one that symbolises the couple's union. The fact that Elango chooses to have the blind calligrapher write in Urdu is also significant. Urdu is the language of poetry par excellence; a language, incidentally, that neither Elango nor most Hindus living in Moti Block understand. This exacerbates the couple's situation. Elango and Zohra are not only going against the system by proclaiming a forbidden love between two feuding religions, Hinduism and Islam. He also dares to create a work of art, not as an offering to the god Shiva as his ancestors did, but as an offering to his beloved. In doing so, Elango transforms a sacred tradition into a profane one in the eyes of the others.⁵ However, Elango does nothing that was not done in the past when syncretism was the norm. As Roy herself explains:

The scene has its origins in the ruins of many medieval monuments in India—dating from as far back as the thirteenth century—where you can see both Islamic and Hindu motifs and designs. Rather than viewing this as mutual enrichment by two kinds of civilization, fanatical believers see it as heresy and there are constant efforts to destroy such monuments, a few of which have been violent, horrifying, and successful. This was the inspiration behind the syncretic sculpture Elango creates (2022, par. 28).

⁵ Roy comments that "[a]rtisanal pottery in India can't be dissociated from its deep and close relationship with religion and myth, and this makes one part of the whole business of pottery very rooted in its ancient traditions, while another is utilitarian and practical" (2022, par. 30).

After the horse is fired, and in the middle of the monsoon, people from Moti Block make their way to the pond, some out of nostalgia for the old tradition, others, the younger ones, out of curiosity to see something new. Word has spread that Elango has created an eight-foot horse for the temple. However, this brief tribute to his art is interrupted when Akkha tells the priests that Elango has created a sacred horse desecrated with foreign words: “How could it be that a holy temple horse had been defaced this way? (Roy, 2021, p. 149). Yet, the text carved by the grandfather in Urdu is not a religious text, but a hymn to freedom of thought. It reads: “*Listen carefully, / Neither the Vedas / Nor the Qur’an / Will teach you this: / Put the bit in its mouth, / The saddle on its back, / Your foot in the stirrup, / And ride your wild runaway mind / All the way to heaven*” (Roy, 2021, p. 132; emphasis in the original).

When the tension of all those who had come to the pond had risen sufficiently to subdue their wills, Akkha began to repeat a chant of violence over and over, thus provoking the desired mass hysteria and hate towards Elango and Zohra: “Kill the potter. Break the horse. Each one who strikes a blow, God ill know, God will know!” (Roy, 2021, p. 150). With great violence and fury, the horse is smashed into a thousand pieces. Others went after Elango, who received many blows to his body and hands, his most coveted and cherished part, for it is the one that allows him to create and subsist. They also found his watch, which he had found in the forest at the same time as Chinna, and which he only wore when he was making the horse, so they also accused him of being a thief. They beat Chinna, who did not hesitate to defend Elango.

Hate shares characteristics with other negative emotions, especially anger, contempt or moral disgust. According to Fisher et al, “the emotivational goal of hate is not merely to hurt but to ultimately eliminate or destroy the target, either mentally (humiliating, treasuring feelings of revenge), socially (excluding, ignoring) or physically (killing, torturing) (2018, p. 311). From a mental perspective, Elango suffers the hatred of the community as a result of the psychological manoeuvre perpetrated by Akkha. He is also publicly humiliated, socially ignored as a member of the community, and forced to flee when he is tortured by them. After this altercation, the lives of Elango, Zohra and Chinna are completely transformed.

All these transformations suffered by the main characters in the denouement are accompanied in the novel by an atmospheric phenomenon that takes place during the monsoon: a flood that transforms the landscape and disrupts the lives of the characters and kills some of them. Fearing another reprisal that could end their lives, Elango and Zohra flee to Delhi where they start a new life together. Much to Elango’s dismay, Chinna is left behind. Zohra’s grandfather dies the same night of the incident, drowned in his old writing desk that he used as a calligrapher. Kummrapet also disappears in the hands of Taatha. New streets and buildings replace the tenements and the lightning tree; the pond is now “a mess of broken and charred things (Roy, 2021, p. 168). Sara’s father also dies within short time. All these changes underline the symbolism of water as an agent of transformation, an element of destruction, a symbol of emotional turmoil and of loss and grief. Finally, in the form of torrential rain, water also represents the end of one cycle and the beginning of another. Years later, Elango and Sara meet in London, where he teaches a ceramics workshop and exhibits

his work. Life has changed for him and Zohra for the better, although they still miss Kummarapet.

2.3. Chinna's Tale: The Threadbinding Hound

Elango finds Chinna in the wilderness and out of pity decides to rescue him. Chinna, as his name suggests,⁶ is just a cub. As he has no proper food to give the animal, Elango decides to chew a hard piece of roti, grind it into mush and then give it to the dog (Roy, 2021, p. 54), thus assuming the role of nurturer. Elango's life changes when he finds the puppy. Chinna awakens in him feelings of tenderness and protection that he did not know he possessed: "At that moment he thought the dog [...] had unlocked something in him that unnerved him with its power. There came times when his feelings caused him to ache in his chest, and then the fear of losing the foundling made him hold the dog closer, babble a silly patter to him [...]. He had not known there were so many words inside him" (Roy, 2021, p. 61). Gradually, however, that happiness is overshadowed. Elango's brother and his wife threaten to harm the dog if he does not find him another place to live. Akka menaces to poison him. Desperate at having to leave Chinna tied up during his working hours, Elango decides to ask Sara's parents to look after him at home.

Chinna is a dog who has been abandoned many times, not because the various people he has lived with throughout his life did not want him but because circumstances, all of them extreme, have forced him to do so. For example, when his first owner wakes up from a coma after being attacked, the first thing he does is call out for Chinna, then called Tashi (Roy, 2021, p. 70). Similarly, his wife tirelessly scours the neighbourhoods near the place where they had left him, even writing to the newspaper where Devika, Sara's mother, works to find him. When Elango is also finally forced to give him up, the dog for days "wandered like a demented dog, not coming home even to eat, then turning up bloodied from dog fights, muddy and defeated, to collapse in a corner of our courtyard" (Roy, 2021, p. 168). Nevertheless, Chinna is a dog that comforts the pain and accompanies the different characters when they go through difficult moments, as when Sara's father suffers the second heart attack and Chinna sleeps next to her; or when the father miraculously survives and asks the dog to be near during his recovery because he can help his heart or when Sara's mother, already widowed and alone, only has Chinna near to comfort her.

As the nucleus of the narrative, Chinna's function is to act as a point of connection between all the characters and conflicts mentioned above. In presenting the dog in this way in the novel, Roy is in tune with the tenets of affective ecocriticism in which the non-human has emerged as a site of negotiation that challenges the dominant position of the human realm (Rahn, 2021, p. 234).⁷ Although lacking a human voice, the dog Chinna wanders through the

⁶ Chinna means "little" in Telugu.

⁷ Rahn argues that postcolonial literatures show a greater engagement with the non-human than other literatures and that this is one more way to countering the Western binary system that divides

characters' lives, acting as an emotional and communicative link. Furthermore, the fact that the dog is unaware of and does not understand all these religious divisions and fanaticisms and understands nothing about them, makes his presence in the novel all the more significant as he invites us to question and challenge human folly. In other words, his impeccable and loyal behaviour towards humans makes us reflect on the arbitrariness of racial and religious boundaries and the foolishness of some human choices. Chinna demonstrates his inherent value as a sentient being and explores issues of religious fanaticism and loss beyond human nonsense. By the end of the novel, Chinna is an old dog, respected by all. He still has a vague memory of the person who smelled of clay and chewed food for him when he was much younger.

3. GENERAL HERMENEUTICAL EVALUATIONS AND FINAL CONCLUSIONS

From the polyhedral analysis that has been carried out in the previous pages it is now necessary to point out a series of hermeneutic keys which I consider to be central and which give rise to and underpin the final conclusions. As observed, all the thematic threads that make up the novel gradually take shape and become coherent. *The Earthspinner* is made up of a series of functional axes of opposition that allow its development. The first is the religious opposition between Hindus and Muslims, which forms the religious and ideological background against which the novel is set. Another axis is the opposition between the young lovers and those who oppose their relationship, i.e. the adults who are socially established and whose social position is therefore not questioned. Nor can we ignore the human/non-human axis, represented by the ensemble of characters and Chinna, together with the terracotta horse and the trees, from the centre of which Roy is able to verbalise some of the fundamental lessons of the novel. Within this axis, the horse acts as a symbol of the union of the lovers, but also of the acceptance of the other. It represents the desired happiness, the integration of the two communities. The horse would then be the intended harmony, the intended end. It would in fact, be the overcoming of chaos. In fact, of all the axes mentioned, the essential one in the novel is that of chaos versus harmony. On the non-human axis and following the structure of the Russian dolls, we observe another opposition between two non-human plant beings: the dead or lightning tree by the pond and the moringa tree in Elango's house. Traditionally, the moringa tree represents the tree of life in India. Therefore, his moringa tree enhances that life that others want to take away. Both, the dead tree and the moringa tree thus function as pairs of functional opposites, heralding the outcome.

It is also important to analyse the title of the novel. Who does the Earthspinner stand for? In a sense, the Earthspinner is represented in the lives of each of the characters. Just as the Moiras or Grim Reapers are the personification of fate in Greco-Latin mythology, these characters are subject to their own destinies. However, who is pulling the strings? Akkha, the

and separates the human from the non-human, and adds that such a stance is part of a long process of decolonisation (2021, p. 235).

witch with her evil arts? Or Taatha, the landlord, with his foul and shameful capitalism? The replacement of Kummarapet and its pond is nothing more than the suppression of one human culture by another inhuman and untraditional one. This society in crisis is prone to misunderstandings, to the separation of individuals (far beyond the separation of lovers). It ultimately involves the exchange of one ecosystem for another, that is, one rural ecosystem based on cultural tradition for another in the pursuit of neoliberalism and the enrichment of a few. It also implies, within the framework of affective ecocriticism, the destruction of one natural environment for another environment of cement that defeats green spaces and thus the loss of the primordial affective link with nature. Such a panorama annihilates hope. The lovers must flee and save themselves. However, before this happens, Elango, faced with the imposition and social isolation he suffers, generates a specific time, a time that corresponds to the moment when he appropriates the watch, which he only puts on when he creates the terracotta horse. In addition to generating his own unit of time, he also chooses a space, that of the lightning tree and the pond, a space that belongs to tradition. The lightning tree, precisely because it is skeletonised, is a witness of the passing of time. Through the horse, Elango also creates an illusion, the illusion of beauty and the search for happiness. Love between Elango and Zohra, then, is not possible in the environment in which they find themselves. Somehow, the environment is blocked by the pressure of this community, which is alien to individual rights, envious of the lovers' happiness and negatively influenced by religious and social prejudices, and manipulated by capitalist interests.

Returning to the interpretation of the novel's title, we can also see how the Earthspinner is related to the Wheel of Fate. Roy compares the movement of the wheel, the moment of creation, to the spinning of the planet. The world spins on the deterministic thread of fate. On several occasions throughout the novel, Roy speaks of the movement of the earth and how it is in constant transformation; an idea that the writer emphasizes through the symbolism of fire and water. However, the Earthspinner also alludes to the stories lived by the three main characters. Sara through the threads of nostalgia and by reflecting on the concept of home, sorts out her past in order and redeems the feeling of guilt and remorse for the moments she did not devote to her father while he was still alive. Elango through creativity, which allows him to dream of other possible worlds that are later destroyed by his enemies. A craftsman, Elango speaks through his hands and from his imagination. Through his encounter with Chinna, he learns a new language, that of tenderness. However, in order to verbalise this new attitude, to articulate this new process of expression and to adopt this new perspective, he has to assimilate, imitate and share the tenderness that Chinna symbolises. This mimesis is an indispensable condition for the construction of the horse, which also represents tenderness, especially because this horse is the link with his beloved. This is why the meeting with Chinna, the meeting with Zohra and the dream of the terracotta horse take place almost simultaneously. Thus, when he gets the watch, he keeps the dog, but links his time to the construction of the horse and the beloved as destiny. The watch allows him to act from the atmosphere of tenderness as a creative process, but the watch also allows him to create a time that is absolutely his own, alien to social circumstances and the gaze of others and linked

exclusively to the creation of the dreamed beauty. When Elango builds the horse, he creates beauty in the time marked by his watch. Elango knows that his time to create beauty is limited. It is his social environment that limits his time, either out of religious conviction or out of envy. Envy of his courage, his creativity and his daring to cross religious boundaries. The space in which the horse is created was at first a despised and little-visited place. However, when someone creates beauty in his or her environment everything changes. Elango analyses his dreams, applies his vision and beautifies his surroundings. Ultimately, through the union or nexus of all the worlds, Chinna represents balance. Chinna occupies the space in-between and thus helps the lovers to come together. Indeed, it is through Chinna's experiences in his different phases that the reader reflects on the human condition. The human condition is depicted as miserable because the neighbourhood of Kummarapet does not accept the union of the lovers and this is a significant fact because it means that the lovers would have transcended social and religious conventions. However, Elango and Zohra pursue only one goal, love, and only one religion, that of their union. Their syncretism is personal, but their example is also an affirmation of cultural syncretism, of cross-cultural understanding and acceptance. Zohra's grandfather, the blind calligrapher, like the mythological figure of the notorious Tiresias, evokes justice and fairness.⁸ That is why he is blind, because he is not carried away by appearances. He favours the lovers, he is their accomplice.

The wheel is also a reference to the inexorable passage of time. In Greco-Latin myth mentioned above, the three Moiras or Grim Reapers regulated the length of life from birth to death. Using a thread, the first spun, the second wound and the third cut when a person's life came to an end. In this sense, there are two times in *The Earthspinner*. That of the limited, subjective watch and that of the wheel, objective, absolute, constant and inexorable. The social, religious and cultural environment acts as a prison. By taking the watch from the forest, Elango creates his own time. In it he would have created his happiness, that of his beloved, his dog, Zohra's grandfather, but the others, for different reasons, "take away his time," they take the watch away from him. In the final conflict and denouement of the novel, individuality is denied, the members of these communities destroy the horse and harm Elango, Chinna and others. It seems that the society portrayed prefers to be alienated into its own systems of morality and social behaviour. Such alienated beings deny the independent-minded individual and unwittingly deny themselves the opportunity to exploit their own capacities, for example, to create their own beauty and to pursue their own goals beyond the social life that human existence is made to be by certain powers (factual or otherwise). Cultural, inter-religious reconciliation (which was another of the values represented by the horse) is also denied. Akha incites the masses, arouses jealousy and envy and, above all, creates conflict between the two religious communities. Finally, yet importantly, the Earthspinner is also

⁸ In Greek mythology, Tiresias is often regarded as the representative of justice and fairness. Frequently portrayed as an impartial figure, he delivers his prophecies without bias. His blindness is also interpreted as a metaphor for his spiritual enlightenment. The parallel with the blind calligrapher in *The Earthspinner* is then more than obvious.

Anuradha Roy who spins worlds and offers important teachings, but also shows that it is not always easy to change the world, even though it is in constant motion.

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