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MONSTROUS RUBBISH ECOLOGIES AND PUNITIVE ECOHORROR IN JOSEPH D'LACEY'S *GARBAGE MAN*

JOSEPH D'LACEY'İN *GARBAGE MAN* ROMANINDA CANAVAR ÇER-ÇÖP EKOLOJİLER VE CEZALANDIRICI EKOKORKU

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Öz

Patricia Yaeger ve Heather Sullivan tarafından sırasıyla önerilen "çer-çöp ekolojisi" ve "kirli doğa" kavramlarını genişleten bu makale, Joseph D'Lacey'nin Garbage Man [Çöp Adam] (2009) romanında doğayı çöp ve kirli olarak sorunsallaştırmaktadır. Bunu yaparken, bu çalışma, her yerin şu an nasıl bir çöp alanı olduğunu ve her bölgeye ve vücuda sızan çeşitli atık türlerinin gerçekliğimizi kökten nasıl yeniden şekillendirdiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Zehirli çöplük sorununu ele alan Garbage Man, tamamen harap olmuş bir yerin umutsuz bir vizyonunu anlatmakta ve insan endüstrisi ürünlerinin insanları ve çevreyi nasıl kirlettiğini göstermektedir. Bu ekolojik korku (ekokorku), aynı zamanda atığı, Shreve'deki nüfusun çoğunu öldüren tehlikeli, canavar bir çöp adam, "Fecalith" olarak yeniden tasavvur edilmesini örneklendirmektedir. Dolayısıyla, bu makale, başkahraman Mason Brand'in, çer-çöpün tamamen yıkıcı olduğu fikrini nasıl pekiştirdiğini göstermektedir. Böylelikle, canavar çer-çöp ekolojilerindeki karşılaştıkları dünyanın belirsizliğini ve kargaşasını belirtirken, başkahraman ölmekte olan ve değişen çevreye yeniden uyum sağlamaya çalışır. Roman, dolayısıyla atıklarla ve çer-çöplerle olan çağdaş meşguliyetlerimizi değerlendirebileceğimiz kırılmış bir ayna olarak okunabilir. D'Lacey, özellikle bu eko-korkuda çer-çöp ekolojilerinin kasvetli bir vizyonunu ortaya koyarak, atığın tüketici toplumundaki merkeziyetini gözler önüne sermekte ve Shreve halkını cezalandırarak kurtuluş umudu sunmamaktadır. Sonuç olarak, bu makalenin de kabul ettiği gibi, D'Lacey, yirmi birinci yüzyılda doğayla ne hale geldiği hakkında daha geniş tartışmalara katkıda bulunarak, doğayla bağlantımızla ilgili kaygılarımız ve korkularımıza dair bir içgörü sağlar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Joseph D'Lacey, Garbage Man, çer-çöp ekolojisi, kirli doğa, ekokorku, ekoeleştiri

Abstract

Expanding on the notions of "rubbish ecology" and "dirty nature" proposed respectively by Patricia Yaeger and Heather Sullivan, this article problematizes nature as rubbish and dirty in Joseph D'Lacey's Garbage Man (2009). In so doing, this study discloses how every place is now a place of rubbish, and how various types of waste that infiltrate into every territory and body radically reconfigure our reality. Addressing the problem of toxic landfill, Garbage Man describes a desperate vision of a totally ruined place and shows how the products of human industry contaminate people and the environments. This ecohorror also exemplifies the reimagining of waste as a dangerous, monstrous garbage man, "Fecalith," which has killed most of the population in Shreve. So, this article illustrates how the protagonist, Mason, serves to reinforce the suggestion that waste is totally destructive and disruptive. As such, the protagonist attempts to make re-attunement to the dying and changing environment as his encounter in monstrous rubbish ecologies brings him face to face the uncertainty and disorder of the world. The novel thus can be read as a refracted mirror through which we can consider our contemporary preoccupation with garbage, waste, and rubbish. In particular, conjuring up a bleak vision of rubbish ecologies in this ecohorror, D'Lacey illustrates the centrality of waste to consumer society and offers no hope for redemption by punishing the people of Shreve. As a result, as this article concedes, D'Lacey contributes to larger discussions about what nature has become in the twenty-first century, providing insights into our concerns and fears regarding our connection to nature

Key words: Joseph D'Lacey, Garbage Man, rubbish ecology, dirty nature, ecohorror, ecocriticism.

INTRODUCTION: WASTE AND NATURE

Drawing upon waste studies as "a literary and cultural critical approach" (Morrison, 2015, p. 2), this study analyses the literary depictions of waste (also used as garbage, thrash, refuse, debris, rubbish, detritus) in Joseph D'Lacey's *Garbage Man* (2009) by using the concepts of "rubbish ecology" and "dirty nature" proposed respectively by Patricia Yaeger and Heather Sullivan. In order to understand the specific character of rubbish ecology and dirty nature, and to place them within the ecocritical analysis of the novel, it is necessary first to comment on waste. According to William Rathje and Cullen Murphy (1992), trash refers to the "'dry' stuff – newspapers, boxes, cans, and so on," while garbage "refers technically to 'wet' discards – food remains, yard waste, and offal" (p. 9). However, refuse as an inclusive term covers both, and rubbish "refers to all refuse plus construction and demolition debris" (p. 9). In this article, these terms are used interchangeably, though they have slightly different connotations. In the context of a view that "waste is always material (first) and figurative and metaphoric (second)" (Morrison, 2015, p. 8), waste has so multifarious meanings and myriad interpretations that it defies the exact definition. As Rachele Dini (2016) remarks, however, waste chiefly emerges, "metaphorically, as a sign of a system gone awry, or literally, as an obstacle to production; as a reproach to our compulsion to consume, or as a means to shock and arrest us into thinking otherwise; as something produced and expelled by humans, or as a category to which humans themselves are relegated" (p. 214). In this formulation, waste is associated with dis/order, conflict, creation, destruction, desire, the unwanted, useless or valueless. In many forms, waste becomes a material and discursive entity, and rather than being stable, immobile, and durable, waste is contingent, viscous, and liminal as it transgresses borders, boundaries, and limits.

Waste as a high theme occupies a pivotal position in the reconstitution of nature as rubbish ecology and dirty nature in Patricia Yaeger's and Heather Sullivan's ecocritical conceptualizations. Contemporary reality, according to their vision, is one in which waste infiltrates every human and nonhuman body, every urban and rural place, and even art itself, creating a nexus between society and nature. Yaeger (2008) calls attention to how the "old opposition between nature and culture has been displaced in postmodern art by a preoccupation with trash" (p. 323). It is argued that there is no place apart from waste. In her view, the search for a seamless, pristine, coherent nature is fruitless, for "[w]e are born into a detritus-strewn world," and "the nature that buffets us is never culture's opposite" (Yaeger, 2008, p. 323). Not only does she question the distinction between nature and culture, but also uses trash as a substitute for nature. In what she calls "rubbish ecology," "detritus replace[s] nature" (2008, p. 331). In doing so, she defines rubbish ecology as "the act of

saving and savouring debris" (2008, p. 329). On the intersection of trash and nature, Yaeger (2008) presents a new constitution of nature as rubbish ecology:

> [T]he binary trash/culture has become more ethically charged and aesthetically interesting than the binary nature/culture. In a world where nature is dominated, polluted, pocketed, eco-touristed, warming, melting, bleaching, dissipating, and fleeing toward the poles—detritus is both its curse and its alternative. Trash is the becoming natural of culture, what culture, eating nature, tries to cast away. (p. 338)

Rubbish ecology in this respect focuses on waste as the prime signifier of culture dominating nature and becoming nature. But, critics like Michael Sloane raise important questions regarding rubbish ecology: "[W]hy is culture left intact if it is inextricably linked to its 'opposite'? That is, is trash not a byproduct of culture? And what happens to nature if nature is not just green?" (Sloane, 2012, p. 87). In an answer to these questions, however, Heather Sullivan offers a much broader way of thinking about rubbish ecology beyond the dichotomy of waste/culture, or nature/culture. Heather Sullivan, like Yaeger, advances an argument for the recognition of wastespaces, but she criticizes the commonplace notions of nature and culture in favour of the binary blurring, because she suggests that green approaches to nature contribute to the "dichotomy dividing our material surroundings into a place of 'pure, clean nature' and the dirty human sphere" (2012, p. 515). Hence, she theorizes "dirty nature" as a phenomenon that is "always with us as part of ongoing interactions among all kinds of material agents" (2012, p. 515), and adds that dirty nature is "more process than place" (2012, p. 515). She views both concepts of nature and culture exclusively through the lens of dirt. Considering "the matter of dirt itself" as "both material and discursive" (2011, p. 113), Sullivan (2012) provides insightful comment on dirt theory: "Dirt theory must encompass the full range of life-sustaining and toxic agencies in the soil without flinching" (p. 516). In this view, dirty nature does encompass not only toxic substances that pollute the environment, but also "life-sustaining" forms in the soil. Therefore, dirty nature equates dirt with all the organic and inorganic non/living entities, including the human and the nonhuman, objects, and systems. What matters to this new vitalist way of thinking is "material environmental immersion" (Sullivan, 2012, p. 518); that is, dirty nature is characterized as "an enmeshed process of material interconnectedness" (Sullivan, 2012, p. 520). Here, the outlook of dirty nature chimes in with the notion of rubbish ecology so far as rubbish ecology points to the human and nonhuman immersion in waste, to the interrelationship of nature, culture and trash. Yet, in contrast to rubbish ecology, dirty nature is more inclusive, and posits a more comprehensive means to diagnose material and social realities. Dirty nature means not simply an act of recognition of waste, trash, and garbage as part of the

world in the quotidian life, but also a specific way of relating to waste and the world, a distinctive way that any entity relates to dirt.

GARBAGE MAN: A LITTER-ARY LANDSCAPE

All of these views of dirt, rubbish, garbage, and waste are present in Joseph D'Lacey's *Garbage Man*, which dramatizes how we live in dirty nature pointing to the interrelationship of waste and nature, and waste and culture. For D'Lacey, the human's relation to waste would bring merely destruction even though waste as a spatial dimension blurs the allegedly irrevocable boundaries between pristine nature and social culture, purity and impurity, cleanliness and dirt, birth and decay, use and uselessness, body and world, rather than demarcating the boundaries of the house, the city, or the body. The central problem, as D'Lacey sees it, is that contemporary consumer society serves to demolish the human's "ethical" identification with nature. In this regard, he deals with the complicated relationship between humanity and natural forces. In this relation, D'Lacey positions nature not as an idealized, passive, and predictable entity, but as a complex, unknown, and unpredictable formation capable to nurture and disrupt. In this respect, his version of nature might embody dirty nature in terms of hybridity, multiplicity and fluidity, for dirty nature, as Heather Sullivan (2012) puts it, encompasses "not only nurturing 'soil,' but also depleted soil, dust, the toxic grime on the ground of industrial sites" (p. 517). However, D'Lacey expands the notion of dirty nature by bringing into view both caring, even mythological, benevolent, and destructive, frightening, uncanny, and deadly sides of nature. In particular, he reverses the relations between the human and the nonhuman, waste and culture, life and death, and desire and discard. What D'Lacey posits in *Garbage Man* is that nature becomes the monster when human culture totally infiltrates it. In this regard, "monstrous nature," in Stacy Alaimo's terms (2001, p. 279), finds its best manifestation in *Garbage Man*, which this article will discuss, arguing that monstrous nature is bound up with a destructive force of waste. It is through the literary depiction of waste as imbalance, chaos, abjection, and monster that *Garbage Man* functions as an eco-literary text crystallising our fears of environmental and social collapse. This anxiety underpins much of D'Lacey's novel, which veers between the hopeless recognition of dirty nature and the desire for the rejuvenation of nature.

Nevertheless, *Garbage Man* holds the key to the ultimate question whether nature becomes totally dirty and monstrous, or hybrid and fluid. D'Lacey, moreover, articulates the environmentalist concern that whatever waste we have dumped somewhere beyond human environs would return to us with vengeance. This vengeance in the narrative is directed toward humans, in that *Garbage Man* holds that nature is the central force and that the human realm is

secondary. Despite the fact that this perspective seems to maintain the separation between humans and nature, D'Lacey decentres the human subject as the geological agent of the environmental disruption through the reanimation of waste objects; that is, monstrous dirty natures. He poses the crucial question of how one can save the environment from its rubbish status in the novel. Is the answer to destroy the human presence so as to revitalize the environment? As Dana Phillips and Heather Sullivan (2012) contend, "we must explore the fact that having a very large number of healthy bodies in one species – human beings, for example – can be detrimental to healthy environments" (pp. 445-446). What D'Lacey suggests in the narrative is to test out this view.

Garbage Man posits new realities with environmental ideas and presents an environmental horror narrative of a small Welsh town, Shreve whose colossal landfill toxifies everybody. D'Lacey deftly delineates not only the suburban community of Shreve but the landfill itself. More trash and garbage are dumped, landfilled, and incinerated here every day. So, waste begins to overflow into the town. Although the landfill renders garbage invisible to the inhabitants who walk nearby and possibly carry traces of waste's toxic effects in their bodies, they neither question where their trash goes nor care that the landfill poisons the town and their bodies. Pointing to Shreve marooned in alienation and spiritual malaise, D'Lacey offers a remarkably diverse but humdrum array of characters blighted by their own desires. In order to stave off ecological and moral alienation, the protagonist Mason Brand, once a well-known photographer and a limelight in London, decides to embark on a new life in Shreve after wandering around England. Interestingly, he starts to hear a "calling" from the landfill. Once Mason heeds the call, he helps a new creature born from the landfill. From the toxic landfill emerges the "Fecalith" that horrifically strikes back at humanity, punishing people's abuse of the world around them. For Mason Brand, the fecalith does not stand for frightening and destructive monster; rather, it becomes a saviour. However, the fecalith destroys people by killing and eating them. It becomes a reminder of the end of human beings in the novel. It is possible to see this as retribution for their ignorance of the environment and for their moral transgression.

Indeed, environmental and social anxieties are held in relational tension to one another in the narrative. The novel directly criticizes the consumerist habits as it links moral decay to waste society. Thus, the human predicament takes on a moral dimension. Focusing on social and sexual deviations, dysfunctional families, and voracious desires that undergird moral decay in *Garbage Man*, D'Lacey concedes that it is impossible to separate out the good from the evil, friend from enemy, the redeemable from the abject, and the sick from the healthy in dirty natures. The flawed characters come from three main families, the Smithfields, the Dohertys and the Wades, around

which the story circles. Of all characters, though, the most interesting is Agatha Smithfield, who is prey to her teenage anxiety to become a famous model in London, but she ends up as a prostitute instead, while her father Richard Smithfield, a paedophilic pervert, is seen wandering around the playground. In a way, D'Lacey condemns all the people in Shreve due to their habits intertwined with wastefulness, and the fecalith emerges here as the embodiment of ultimate "ecohorror."

As a key between the conflicting realities of nature, culture, and waste, the central character, Mason Brand, who exudes nothing but fame and greed as a famous photographer, struggles desperately to find a new home in England. Mason believes that people marooned in rapacious consumer life could set free themselves by turning to nature. So, by buying "a tiny mobile home" (D'Lacey, 2009, p. 38), he reaches Scotland. However, he realizes that the "barren Scottish wilds hurt him with their emptiness almost as much as London's overpopulation and amorality had affronted him" (D'Lacey, 2009, p. 38). After that, wandering around Welsh mountains, which invigorates him, Mason comes upon a poor-farmer family so old that they live as though they were spectres of the forest, and dwell in a derelict farmhouse. Here, the farmer tutors Mason, and he learns "stories sometimes, tales of people who lived in times lost to memory and history," and the farmer "taught about the Earth and the land" (D'Lacey, 2009, p. 70). The lessons are nature-oriented and about elemental forces of nature, whether visible or invisible. In one lesson, the farmer, like a shaman, makes "the woods silent then, like a conductor, and creature by creature, sound by sound, mood by mood," and then, he brings "it back to life and Mason's soul was enchanted" (D'Lacey, 2009, p. 70). This ritualistic lesson enables Mason to realize that nature is not by any means a simple entity; rather, it is an unknowable, complex, and uncanny one.

As "a creature of the land and of the forest" (D'Lacey, 2009, p. 61), Mason knows that humans are part of nature, however calming as well as fearsome it may be. When he lives in the suburbia of Shreve, he yearns for a tranquil nature. As the narrator comments, Mason's "true solitude came during his time among the trees" (D'Lacey, 2009, p. 61). Is nature still a source of pleasure, beauty, delight, solitude, and solace? The narrator continues to assert as follows: "The land and the trees and all the animals he'd shared the woods with had a voice, one voice, a calling. […] They talked and the land talked and they never shut up" (D'Lacey, 2009, p. 61). In this way, occasionally, the narrator commiserates with the protagonist in the novel. What *Garbage Man* posits here is that the mistake is to believe that nature is inert, silent, and predictable. Instead, nature is a vibrant place of wondrous and threatening occurrences. Later, for Mason, this calling turns out to be a warning for humans in Shreve. Any nostalgia for an ostensibly safer and greener,

better and purer ecology dissolves into a bitter recognition that garbage, waste, and trash now constitute nature. Thus, Mason Brand finds himself drawn into investigating the landfill.

By redefining the boundary between nature and garbage, D'Lacey provides a grim panorama of Shreve near the biggest landfill in Britain. Around it on all sides are only forest, sea, and landfill. Appearing as grey and gloomy, the town is a post-industrial place, a lonely and sad one, defined only by its landfill. The colossal toxic dumping area, called Shreve District Council landfill, is juxtaposed with both the brownland and the woods as a green field. No matter how the landfill toxifies the landscape, the juxtaposition creates a contrast in the novel. First of all, the forest near the landfill solely emerges as a green ecological spot. For instance, the goth-girl Delilah provides an articulate commentary on the recuperative side of nature. After being gang raped, she survives in the woods, purifying and rejuvenating her body: "This was the place where their [rapists'] power had fallen into the ground, impotent and wasted. This was my place, not theirs. I used the dirt where I'd squatted to perform cleansing rituals on myself" (D'Lacey, 2009, p. 229). Such a passage clearly underlines the purification through dirt. Notwithstanding that Delilah is associated with dirty nature, the horrific behaviour of men in terms of sexual perversity is challenged here by means of dirty nature. In other words, the element of man's domination is reversed, which is the premise of the novel as a whole. So, dirty nature restores Delilah's body. Second, the brownland surrounding the landfill shows that Shreve was formerly a mining town whose economy depended on coal mining. The landfill "led out onto an expanse of brownland where the grass that grew was sparse and clumped. Underfoot was coke and slag from the open cast coal mine that had been there before the days of the landfill" (D'Lacey, 2009, p. 27). This brown landscape exemplifies how mining at an industrial scale has already poisoned the environment during and after the coal extraction. The extraction and the landfilling here point not only to the environmental degradation, but also to the inversion of the "natural" order. The mining field and landfill of Shreve emerge as a gothic space capable of containing deadly secrets, as a maternal repository to produce monstrous natures, and as dirty nature. All of these landscapes are postlapsarian environments ravaged by industrial practices. They are part of Shreve's dark "litter-ary" landscape. The most important is the Shreve landfill, which the omniscient narrator describes in vivid detail:

> The driver slammed the truck into gear and ground away along the temporary road leading to the landfill cells. Very soon, when the canyons of trash were all filled, the whole landfill would be sealed and covered with soil. They'd turn it onto a public park or sports centre or playing field and, in time, no one would remember the network of

> feeder roads that led the trucks to the huge mouths in the earth which swallowed the town's muck silently and willingly. (D'Lacey, 2009, p. 20)

As this passage shows, the landfill is transformed into a cultural space after it is covered with soil. Irrespective of how garbage is controlled and managed, it is inevitable that hazardous chemicals continue to affect the environment. Edward Humes (2013) remarks that trash might be "deadly when you bury it" (p. 24). Obviously, the landfill is a toxic and destructive place, one full of what people throw away every day. It is no doubt that the "modern landfill is the graveyard of 'quotidian' culture" (O'Brien, 2008, p. 54). In this view, the landfill literally and metaphorically incorporates death, destruction, dissolution, mortality, oblivion, and impermanence. However, the landfill is also a reflection of people's habits, behaviour, and customs, a history of objects and humanity. Indeed, landfills shed light on today's consumer society as archaeological sites. However, through the landfill, which human overconsumption has created, *Garbage Man* presents a critique of modern consumerism depleting the planet.

Besides, by means of the example of the dump site of Shreve, D'Lacey asserts that nature cannot remain separate from the cultural remnants, and draws attention to waste/ culture/ nature connections. Reading the novel through the lens of dirty nature reveals that the "natural" and cultural spheres can be breached through waste. At the nexus between nature and waste is Mason Brand who develops an entirely different relationship with waste with his repeated visits to the landfill. Discovering something alluring in the landfill, he extols the soil-covered dump site: "To anyone else it would have been the filthiest place on Earth. To Mason Brand it was a place of power, even more sacred and essential than his precious vegetable garden. He broke in there most nights to make contact with the land" (D'Lacey, 2009, p. 22). Commonly, landfills are stinking, noxious, abhorrent, dreadful, and dangerous places. But, as Susan Signe Morrison (2015) points out, "waste contains the potential to charge, catalyzing ethical behaviour and profound insights, even compassion" (p. 3). Mason's compassion for the landfill depends on his insight that the beautiful can be born out of the terrible. For Mason, "there was something very beneficial about this place of gathered mess and heaped destruction and filth. Something almost holy" (D'Lacey, 2009, p. 23). Obviously, he believes in wasted soil's healing power. As the narrator says, Mason "had a sense of the earth's ability to heal and transform" (D'Lacey, 2009, p. 23). This outlook which equates curative regeneration with dirt, soil, and dust discloses Mason's embracement of dirty nature. "Dirt, soil, earth, and dust," as Sullivan (2012) notes, "are the stuff of geological structure, of the rocky Earth itself, and are mobile like our bodies" (p. 515). This holds true for Mason who uses soil for his illnesses in his house. In his front garden, "hidden among his fruits

and vegetables," Mason generally "would lie awake all night with the worms and the slugs progressing around him. The Earth would draw the spiritual sickness from him and by drawing he would be clean" (D'Lacey, 2009, p. 24). Here, the connection between dirty nature and Mason's body is taken for granted, while the narrator actually establishes a boundary between nature and culture by regarding Mason innocent and clean. What is suggested here is that Mason's connections to the "green" world tie him to the idea that nature is a separate entity away from civilization. His beatification of waste, however, obliterates the understanding of pristine nature. In the landfill, standing "barefoot on a layer of freshly dumped soil" below which "the thin, yielding earth millions of tons of compacted waste rotted" (D'Lacey, 2009, p. 22), Mason "curled his toes into the soil, gripped the Earth, held onto her. She took away his leavings too; bad energies, bad thoughts, sickness before it had the chance to take root in him. Wrongfulness was pulled down through him, leaving him pure" (D'Lacey, 2009, pp. 24-25). Despite rejecting the idea of purity, dirty nature in Sullivan's formulation might be positive and benevolent, which in the novel is highlighted when Mason uses dirt to heal his body, like Delilah had done before.

As Caroline Schaumann and Heather Sullivan (2011) articulate, dirty nature involves "a composite of material interactions on many scales including the activities of bodies, species, and energy politics in which we human beings are full participants along with our fellow species on the planet" (p. 105). The landfill in the novel emerges as such a composite and teems with the leftovers of society: "The expanse below, filled with every kind of rubbish so compressed it was solid enough to build upon, was alive with decomposition. Tiny bugs were multiplying and eating the waste, breaking it down a particle at a time. Even the metals were being oxidised and consumed" (D'Lacey, 2009, p. 22). Replete with useless, valueless, unhealthy, and impure objects, the Shreve landfill, too, is alive; so alive that it gives birth to a living monster-like creature, the fecalith.

At the heart of these arguments is the destructive force ascribed to waste, which is believed to maintain the dualism between nature and society, cleanliness and dirt, purity and impurity, rather than contest the binaries invoked by anthropocentrism. For instance, Susan Signe Morrison (2015) writes that "[s]eparation from garbage makes culture possible" (p. 80). In other words, waste erases the boundaries between bodies, cultures, and the environments. This is what D'Lacey illustrates in the novel, which showcases how these boundaries become viscerally porous. Waste here transmogrifies both nature and culture into a rubbish composite. In order to make this point more emphatic, the narrator occasionally raises a voice about the landfill:

> [T]he landfill was specifically designed not to be an eyesore. What was visible was a laterally-spreading volume of multicoloured trash. Each evening, the machines covered the newest waste with soil. […] The landscape changed so gradually it was impossible to define, even in the space of a day, what it was that had altered. (D'Lacey, 2009, p. 109)

This passage resonates with Patricia Yaeger's observation that "in a world where molecular garbage has infiltrated earth, water, and air, we cannot encounter the natural untouched or uncontaminated by human remains. Trash becomes nature, and nature becomes trash" (2008, p. 332). Thus, this dirty landscape dissolves the very nature/culture binary. A cogent point is that turning nature into trash attests to a post-natural situation that is the nexus where two actors, trash and nature, undergo a kind of fusion. That is the premise of dirty nature conceived as a vast heterogeneous mix of varied in/organic entities. The dirty landscape is a glittering monument to consumer society and global capitalism. "Every landscape," Brian Thill (2015) also claims, is "a trashscape. This not only transforms the world into one vast and unevenly distributed trash heap; it changes, in ways that might not even be perceptible to us, our sense of self and humanity in the world" (p. 4). Obviously, as landfills, dump sites, and junkyards increase all around the world, it is no longer possible to find a pristine place. In Shreve, Mason always feels the presence of the trashscape, regardless of its filthy condition: "When the wind turned, it bore upon it the odorous ghosts of a billion objects – some degradable, others not. Mason's nose recognised it all. He smelled the composted tops, tails and skins of fruits and vegetables – none as wholesome as the ones he grew" (D'Lacey, 2009, p. 109). These rotting objects demonstrate the culmination of human existence in rubbish ecology. That is, the dirty landscape is an adjunct of excess production and overconsumption. Indeed, the landfill is the very embodiment of irrevocability of destructive and malicious behaviour of people as a whole. Further, the novel complicates the landfill as site of destruction, when Mason takes it as a place of renewal. In ruminating on paradoxical interconnection between rejuvenation and destruction, Mason stands "in the fertile surroundings staring through the newly forming fruits and vegetables. Pods, gourds, edible flowers, seed heads, nourishing green stalks. All had grown up from the ash and dust of the earth. All had taken strength and vitality from dead or decaying matter, from things that had once lived" (D'Lacey, 2009, p. 129). Here, Mason's sense of nature as a rubbish composite teeming with cycles of birth, death, decay, and renewal comes through distinctly. For Mason, green plants, such as potatoes, tomatoes, and runner beans, "grew from a special compost that he'd devised over the years. Dead things fed the living. That was the natural way. And flowers, fruits and seeds were the organs by which those

living things reproduced and flourished" (D'Lacey, 2009, p. 130). As such, Mason realizes that destruction is inextricably connected to renewal, which dirty nature embraces. What if the landfill becomes a site of birth and renewal rather than a place of destruction?

MONSTROUS RUBBISH ECOLOGIES

In an afterword, writing the motive behind his novel, D'Lacey addresses such questions: "What have we put down there [landfill]? And what if the combination of chemical and biological waste is similar to the primordial sludge from which life first crawled hundreds of millions of years ago? […] What would happen if the Earth evolved a new way to deal with all our pollution – some kind of new, garbage-eating species perhaps?" (D'Lacey, 2013, p. 276). In this way, the novel connects waste with ecocatastrophe, because D'Lacey creates a "monstrous" nature, called the fecalith. Emerging as a post-natural composite body of garbage, the creature fecalith attempts to strike back at the people of Shreve as "punishment for environmental disruption" (Rust and Soles, 2014, p. 509). It is with the example of the fecalith that *Garbage Man* focuses on the boundary breakdowns between nature and culture, the organic and the inorganic, the human and the nonhuman, thereby suggesting a post-natural rubbish ecology. In fact, the Shreve landfill is a "maternal" place, a place of transmutation, the place from which the fecalith comes. The spawning of the fecalith is narrated as follows:

> Old shirts and mouldering dishrags; torn corduroy trousers and moth-eaten jumpers. Crushed, jagged baked bean cans; short loops of flex; plastic packaging, broken plastic toys; tubing, stuffing, plasterboard, bricks; oxidising springs, hinges and wire; splintered planks and bent nails; light fittings; … keyboards, mice, PCs, laptops, hard drives, monitors, TVs, satellite dishes, speakers, mobile phones, Sim cards, software.
>
> Blood.
>
> Rust.
>
> Lightning.
>
> Intent.
>
> These were the things of which the fecalith was wrought. (D'Lacey, 2009, p. 197)

Here, the fecalith embodies dirty nature in the sense that it emerges as a fragmented but composite entity with a mix of waste objects, which deconstructs the binaries trash/culture, and nature/society. In fact, the formation of the fecalith begins with Mason. The focus of the opening scene in the novel is on the "mythic" ritual of revitalizing the soil, and of creating a new species.

In the mysterious, surreptitious meeting between Mason and Agatha Smithfield, Mason performs a fertility ritual on Midsummer's Day in his garden by using Agatha's blood, which is part of the ecohorror ritual. The spawning of the fecalith depends upon blood, garbage, and lightning as in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). As the novel progresses, Mason finds the fecalith as a baby-rubbish thing in his garden. Bewildered and confused, Mason feels an affinity towards it. Mason regards it not as a living entity but as animated dead matter:

> The thing in the shed was not living in the strictest sense. It had been born amid the slime and ordure of human waste. […] This creature was something new; nature's new vision. […] The creature was the key to a fresh nature in the world, a new logic that would reverse the destructive appetites of humanity. (D'Lacey, 2009, p. 130)

For Mason, the fecalith is nature's new face, one that wants revenge by annihilating humans and thus restoring nature's broken balance. Mason then becomes the main collaborator in humanity's wipe-out. The fecalith inspires in him not just anxiety and awe but also fascination, since Mason experiences an irresistible force associated with the fecalith. As Gay Hawkins (2006) argues, "the sense of wonder or horror" can be "the impulse for new relations: a motivation for a different ethics, a sudden inspiration for a new use" (p. 85). Mason feels this relational affect between himself and the fecalith, but his engagement with the fecalith leads to the annihilation of the townspeople. Therefore, the fecalith remains a source of imminent danger and horror, even for Mason himself in the end. Susan Signe Morrison (2015) suggests that waste "produces a perception of affinity and connection while simultaneously disrupting through difference" (p. 176). This is what Mason feels for the fecalith. Regarding himself as "the midwife of the new nature," or as "the nursemaid of the new nature" (D'Lacey, 2009, p. 130), Mason is enthralled to see how the fecalith grows when fed with his blood. The shed-thing "went back to the landfill and returned with extra parts. Blood was enough to keep it alive, but it needed bone and soft tissue in order to grow. The first time it absorbed a sleeping cat, it returned from the landfill with a second eye and a replacement for the first one" (D'Lacey, 2009, p. 144). Made neither purely of inanimate nor of living flesh, the fecalith is a combination of both elements, a muddy mixture that resists simple categorization. It is suggested that waste is "a way to acknowledge the body; and, with this insight, comes an awareness of the interconnectedness of one's body with those of others, enabling compassion for others" (Morrison, 2015, p. 146).

But would such an acknowledgement inspire any compassion in people? Surely not, as the novel makes clear, Mason feels no compassion for people in the town killed by the fecalith. Instead, the novel posits that rubbish ecology personified by the fecalith is like this; while it illustrates the

interconnection between nature, culture, and waste, good and bad, cleanliness and dirt, it cautions the readers about the consequences of ongoing production of the monstrous amounts of waste. Put differently, there is no sign of mercy and compassion for humans in rubbish ecology represented by the fecalith, even if it is rendered as a non-anthropocentric vision. Given that monsters are "always aggressive, gigantic, man-eating, malevolent, bizarre in shape, gruesome, atavistic, powerful and gratuitously violent" (Gilmore, 2003, p. ix), it is not surprising to see that the fecalith emerges in order to exact revenge on humanity. It grows into a superhumanly masculine entity, gigantic in form.

> Each night he let it out and each morning, long before dawn it returned; larger, altered. It developed itself. […] It improved itself, it self-modified. It appeared to learn as it went what the best combinations were for a strong, resilient frame. This was not the behaviour of senseless dead matter. (D'Lacey, 2009, p. 163-164)

The fecalith, as Serpil Oppermann (2012) would say, has "matter's inherent vitality" (p. 465), as it is posited as "animate; sentient, junkyard mechanics" (D'Lacey, 2009, p. 163). This vitality turns the fecalith into an animate monster which eats people and animals.

Apart from that, the fecalith gains agency and becomes a personification of waste as the unpredictable other. D'Lacey's aim here is to draw attention to the predicament of the planet through the monstrous amounts of humanly produced garbage represented by the fecalith as the garbage man. Presented as a terrifying spectral force, the fecalith is the very embodiment of abjection and grotesqueness. In addition to its vibrancy, the fecalith embodies what Patricia Yaeger (2008) states about detritus: "detritus has unexpectedly taken on the sublimity that was once associated with nature" (p. 327). That is, rubbish ecology both terrorises and fascinates the protagonist, for instance. Thereby this signifies something abject in our relationship to nature. As a monstrous body in pieces, the fecalith is simultaneously beyond the limitations of the human world, yet also is very familiar to that world:

> The old man's offerings – the hedgehogs and cats and rabbits, his own blood and the mind and body of the boy – all these flowed and lived within him, as aspects of his vast and growing consciousness, as did the blood of the boy's sister. They formed the templates from which inanimate things became living. […] In his steel-cased skull processors, motherboards, hard drives and software grew and evolved. Awareness seeped into the circuitry, code flowed into its assembly of brains.

> Like all sentient beings, he contemplated the reason for his becoming, the purpose of his existence. The where of it, the when of it, the how. (D'Lacey, 2009, p. 198)

As this passage illustrates, the fecalith is "becoming" a cacophonous agglomeration of trash objects, but it is alive, sentient, and intelligent like a human being. Indeed, it is through the fecalith that the novel attends to rubbish ecology, combining dirty nature and the relational dynamics of waste: "Muck and blood flowed in the veins and improvised tubules of the creature, death and life mingled to make some third state – newborn in the world" (D'Lacey, 2009, p. 199). The fecalith speaks to an in-between, threshold and living-dead status, both horrifying and fascinating. In this way, it threatens stability, cohesion, and order. Highlighting horrific monsters' breakdown of the distinctions between living and dead, Noel Carroll (1990) argues that "[o]ne structure for the composition of horrific beings is fusion. On the simplest physical level, this often entails the construction of creatures that transgress categorical distinctions such as inside/outside, living/dead, insect/human, flesh/machine" (p. 43). As an assemblage of trash continually being reconfigured and remade, the monstrous rubbish fecalith "embodies the existential threat to social life, the chaos, atavism, and negativism that symbolize destructiveness and all other obstacles to order and progress" (Gilmore, 2003, p. 12). But Mason Brand believes that the fecalith emerges as a ravenous monster to save nature in the novel. Obviously, the fecalith's central aim is to persecute the miscreant. For Mason and the fecalith, it is human condition that is frustrating, and that is thwarted. Whether seeking to take revenge on humans or salvaging the planet from humans, the fecalith arrives to take Shreve away from humans as though he was its rightful owner.

Notably, D'Lacey sets his story up for an ecodisaster, and the monstrous disaster dutifully arrives on the scene. Lost in the woods, Delilah's lover, Ray Wade's attention is arrested by the sight of the fecalith, and then, he witnesses the fecalith creating new rubbish monsters in the landfill which becomes a site of mystery for the characters. As soon as Ray observes that the "trash from the landfill was alive. The garbage man was coming" (D'Lacey, 2009, p. 204), he is so petrified that he just smells the "wafted rot of re-forged detritus and reanimated filth" (D'Lacey, 2009, p. 204). Later, Ray attends how the fecalith uses the landfill as a "feminine" reproductive force: "The garbage man knelt and thrust the power-spewing ligament deep into the rubbish. […] Then the surface of the landfill began to pulsate and liquefy. It began to boil. Embryonic shadows, too small and distant to define, began to slither and crawl from the deep pits of trash" (D'Lacey, 2009, p. 205). As discussed earlier, the landfill serves as a gothic maternal place to produce monstrous natures. But, rather than rendering the maternal body monstrous, D'Lacey constructs the obviously male fecalith as a freakish entity of abject monstrosity, and later on new rubbish creatures arrive,

and begin to feed on humans in Shreve which turns out to be “an invasion site” (D’Lacey, 2009, p. 253) thronged with new rubbish ecologies. The garbage creatures “made use of absolutely everything, not a scrap was wasted,” and so “re-forged themselves into something better, something stealthier, something faster” (D’Lacey, 2009, p. 269). Neither entirely liquid nor purely solid, the creatures are remaking themselves as vibrant actors. Adding up something rubbish to their split bodies, they grow into something bigger, becoming more monstrous. With organic and inorganic appendages, rubbish creatures transform and renew themselves. That is, they turn waste into a new life. Refuting the idea that waste is only dead matter, *Garbage Man* reinforces the idea that waste is a dangerously vibrant thing. This is reiterated in the survival scene of Ray, Delilah, and Jimmy in the narrative. Throughout Shreve, more and more people fall victims to the ravenous rubbish creatures which communicate with each other. After witnessing what the fecalith has done in the landfill, Ray finds Delilah, and together they seek refuge from monstrous ecologies. Then, in their search, they come upon Jimmy, a young man, both horrified and terrorized. In order to run away from these inhuman garbage creatures, they temporarily take shelter in a shopping market also ravaged by the grotesque beings. Here, Ray and Delilah watch Jimmy being broken into smithereens, noting how a new monstrous nature is amalgamated out of the leftovers of Jimmy: “The other limbs were busy cutting Jimmy’s body into useful pieces and attaching them to itself. […] Bones were attached to steel frames, plastic and skin were clamped or stapled together, veins and tubing were welded with a festering ichor that blurred the distinction between flesh and inanimate material” (D’Lacey, 2009, p. 311). The fusion deconstructing the boundary between living and dead emerges as a new rubbish monster. This imbrication of trash, human, and nature conjures up a post-natural vision of rubbish ecology in which every corporeality is embedded in trash.

Developing a complex relationship between nature and society, waste and culture, human and nonhuman, *Garbage Man* also challenges the division between self and other. The line between self and other is compromised in the relation between Mason and the fecalith, for Mason is a reflection of masculinized humanist self, and the fecalith stands for the monstrous other. “Waste,” as Susan Signe Morrison (2015) explains, is “both the other and of ourselves and forces us to confront our own natural instincts and temptations” (p. 143). Mason, in this respect, plays an influential role in re-establishing a connection with the other, that is, the fecalith, contributing to dirty nature. In order to become totally united in the fecalith, Mason visits the Shreve landfill filled with active trash, vibrant waste, vital rubbish, and “living garbage” (D’Lacey, 2009, p. 315). There the fecalith stands as a heterogeneous whole, a horrendous entity moving as one, living as one,

behaving as one, and thinking as one. For Mason, the fecalith develops into "a monstrous humanoid tower. It was fashioned of steel and timber and plastic and glass and circuitry and was welded together with the flesh of a thousand living creatures" (D'Lacey, 2009, p. 315). Seen as a hybrid rubbish being, the fecalith is "beyond the human, the superhuman, the unnameable, the tabooed, the terrible, and the unknown" (Gilmore, 2003, p. 10). This monstrous corporeality elicits not disgust, horror, and sickness but affection, seduction, and affinity for Mason, since he feels an instant connection with the fecalith. Mason's identification with this garbage man offers an uncanny recognition of the other as an inseparable property of himself as in Gay Hawkins's argument for the relation with waste: "the affective responses that waste can trigger disrupt oppositions between self and world or self and waste" (2006, p. 121). As his act disrupts the Cartesian self/other binary, Mason decides to enter into the fecalith's rubbish body:

> The hand pressed him into darkness and there, inside the fecalith's torso, he heard the beating of its giant borrowed heart. […] Wires and tubes reached out towards Mason in the resounding blackness. Copper and rubber arteries pierced his head and neck. Animal veins and capillaries melted through his skin and attached themselves to his own. The plasma of poisonous excrement and homogenised bloods which flowed through the fecalith's vessels began to flow in his. (D'Lacey, 2009, p. 316)

Distinctly, the fecalith draws Mason toward itself, attracting him to peer down into its gothic darkness. He believes that the world is about to end with the triumph of the fecalith, even though it means a kind of self-annihilation. Being conquered and invaded by the fecalith, Mason begins to become, very physically, part of the fecalith's rubbish ecology. As the narrator comments, the fecalith "shared everything with Mason, just as Mason had shared everything with it" (D'Lacey, 2009, p. 325). In doing so, Mason realizes "both the otherness of nature and its continuity with the human self" (Plumwood, 1993, p. 160). The fusion obviously shows how deeply and profoundly people's bodies are intertwined with what they throw away. In the fecalith's rubbish corporeality, the fecalith and Mason coalesce into one entity, forming a post-natural dirty nature:

> In the chest of the fecalith, Mason changed. The filth that flowed in its veins now flowed in his through the many tubular and canular connections between them. […] Mason was deeply fulfilled, though, for he had become one with the new life, the new nature and that was more than he could ever have hoped for. (D'Lacey, 2009, pp. 325-326)

This lurid passage bespeaks the loss of boundaries of self and its absorption into the other as a whole, both heterogeneous and fragmented. This union is like "an enlarged sense of inter-

connection between self and others, including the non-human or 'earth' [rubbish] others" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 49). The new relationship with garbage that Mason develops points to the uncanny sense of something being both self and other, self and waste.

CONCLUSION

Rubbish ecologies, all in all, get their revenge by unleashing a gory fury which destroys the majority of humans. This way, the novel questions if saving and cleansing the environment through monstrous rubbish natures is possible, whether "monstrous natures may be more green than they seem" (Alaimo, 2001, p. 292). With the help of Mason, the fecalith succeeds in conducting a clean-up operation to eliminate human presence as enemy from the world: "The world was about to self-cleanse again, the fecalith showed him. Its birth in the depths of the landfill was only an early sign of the change. Mason had been right all along, the fecalith was a new order of life" (D'Lacey, 2009, p. 327). This lesson is the recognition that both human and nonhuman communities totally depend on the environment within which they dwell; hence, the narrative promotes an environmental consciousness, while also exemplifying the very fact that waste becomes part of our life no matter how we strive to shun it. *Garbage Man* also presents a palpable critique of capitalism, illustrating that excessive consumption and production do not provide a way out for both the individual and the community. The novel then becomes a refracted mirror through which we consider our contemporary preoccupation with garbage, waste, trash, and rubbish.

Regarding waste essentially as bad, D'Lacey acknowledges that waste is a fundamental actor in producing rubbish ecology and in breaking down the boundaries. Therefore, what D'Lacey ultimately suggests is that the removal and elimination of waste need to be a precondition for human and nonhuman survival in the planet. Otherwise, modern society might be hopelessly corrupted and degraded, both physically and morally, by the repercussions of overconsumption and consumerism.

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EXPANDED SUMMARY

The article conceptualises transformed environments as rubbish ecologies in Joseph D'Lacey's *Garbage Man*, exploring the pervasive environmental damage brought about by pollution and waste in a small town, called Shreve. To start with, conceptually, contemporary reality, according to Patricia Yaeger's and Heather Sullivan's ecocritical visions, is one in which waste infiltrates every human and nonhuman body, every urban and rural place, and even art itself, creating a nexus between society and nature. Yaeger (2008) calls attention to how the "old opposition between nature and culture has been displaced in postmodern art by a preoccupation with trash" (p. 323). It is argued that there is no place apart from waste. In her view, the search for a seamless, pristine, coherent nature is fruitless, for "[w]e are born into a detritus-strewn world," and "the nature that buffets us is never culture's opposite" (Yaeger, 2008, p. 323). Not only does she question the distinction between nature and culture, but also uses trash as a substitute for nature. In what she calls "rubbish ecology," "detritus replace[s] nature" (2008, p. 331). In doing so, she defines rubbish ecology as "the act of saving and savouring debris" (2008, p. 329). This rubbish ecological reality actually relies on what Heather Sullivan (2012) calls "dirty nature," which is another concept that aims to shed light on the relational status of nature. Sullivan posits that dirt, as a pivotal part of "dirty nature," eliminates the strict separation of nature and culture, and points to the contingent status of natures and cultures. For Sullivan, "dirt" in dirty nature is both "life-

sustaining" and also filled with "toxic agencies" (2012, p. 516). Drawing more attention to the material interactions of nature, culture, pollution, and bodies, Sullivan (2012) suggests that dirty nature reveals dirt both as a generative life in natures and as a toxic substance that is dangerous to these natures. Dirty nature in this regard views nature as a complex and ambivalent meeting point of human and nonhuman realms, full of tensions and frictions.

In this context, set in a toxic landfill site where rubbish is buried and forgotten in the Welsh hills, the novel depicts a rubbish future where waste crisis, economic crises, health crises, and personal crises all jostle, each of which poses a threat to human and nonhuman life. Addressing the problem of toxic landfill, *Garbage Man* describes a desperate vision of a totally ruined place and shows how the products of human industry contaminate people and the environments. The novel portrays the people of Shreve, most of whom are selfish, greedy, and oblivious. The protagonist Mason Brand, a former well-known photographer, lives near the dumpsite, and communes with nature, thinking that this is a healing act. However, a thing called "Fecalith" emerges from rubbish, junk, and trash. This abject "monster" gradually acquires "human" attributes and becomes a garbage "man" who feeds on trash and flesh of humans and animals, terrorizing the inhabitants of Shreve.

The novel, to conclude, can be read as a refracted mirror through which we can consider our contemporary preoccupation with garbage, waste, trash, and rubbish. In particular, conjuring up a bleak vision of rubbish ecology and society in the novel, D'Lacey illustrates the centrality of waste to consumer society and offers no hope for redemption. In this regard, D'Lacey contributes to larger discussions about what nature has become in the twenty-first century, providing insights into our concerns and fears regarding our connection to the natural world.