



Eco-Criticism in *Rescued* by Eliot Schrefer

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ABSTRACT

Eliot Schrefer is an American writer famous for adult fiction and young adult fictional books. The book *Rescued* is an example for animal fiction. Eco-Criticism gives importance to harmonious existence of the protagonist with his or her environment. This paper analyses the man-animal relationship in *Rescued* by Eliot Schrefer. The central theme is Raja's, the orangutan's struggle in captivity. This book deals with the treatment of animals in captivity. In the end, the whole story is based on the struggle of John to save Raja, the orangutan, and to find a better place to live. The book *Rescued* reveals the readers that animals deserve a safe place to live and human beings need to treat animals with concern.

William Rueckert in 1978 coined the term ecocriticism. Glotfelty defines ecocriticism as "...the study of the relationship between literature and physical environment...ecocriticism takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies" (Sumathy 2-3).

Eco-Criticism gives importance to harmonious existence of the protagonist with his or her environment. The book *Rescued* reveals the readers that animals deserve a safe place to live and human beings need to treat animals with concern.

Eliot Schrefer was in Chicago in United States of America on November 25, 1978. Schrefer is known for his adult fiction and young adult fiction. He has completed his Bachelor of Arts in Literature at Harvard University. *Glamorous Disasters* (2006) published by Simon & Schuster is Eliot Schrefer's first novel. Schrefer is best known for his Ape Quartet Series namely, *Endangered* (2012), *Threatened* (2014), *Rescued* (2016) and

Orphaned (2018). These novels are survival stories which feature the young adolescents and apes. Schreffer has published eleven novels.

The Lost Rainforest Series, Spirit Animals Series, The New Kid (2007), *Hack the SAT* (2008), *The School for Dangerous Girls* (2009), *The Deadly Sister* (2010) and *Greek Fantasy Novel* (2011) are some of his notable works. Schreffer's novels have been translated into Russian, Polish, Romanian, and German languages. Some of his awards are National Book Award Finalist in 2012 and 2014, Sigurd Olson Nature Writing Award 2013 and Green Earth Book Award in 2013. Schreffer is one of the faculty of the Hamline University and Fairleigh Dickinson University MFA in creative writing programs and he reviews children's book in *USA Today*. Schreffer currently lives in New York City.

The protagonist of the novel *Rescued* is John Solomon and Raja, the orangutan. John Solomon's father brought Raja, the orangutan from Indonesia. When John is ten, his father brought Raja. Now John is sixteen years and the orangutan is grown and it is potentially dangerous. Raja deserves a better place than living in a tiny enclosure. This novel portrays the issues of animals in captivity. This novel is mainly set in United States of America and it also portrays the journey of John and Raja to Indonesian Island of Sumatra.

When Raja was a baby orangutan, he was nursed well by John and his parents. In the beginning, they took care of Raja like a human child and he found his own space living with human beings in their home. Raja copied John's food habits and started eating fruits and vegetables and brownies and Raja avoided eating the poisonous fruits: At first Raja drank baby formula, an I'd nurse him in a wicker chair out back. But as he adjusted to life in his new home, he became disdainful of the formula, boxing the bottle out of my hands. Instead he only wanted what *I* was eating. Fruits, vegetables, all the way up the food chain to Pop-Tarts and brownies. I found out online that copying whatever their mom was eating was how baby wild orangutans avoided eating poisonous fruit. (*Rescued* 17)

John and his parents started to think that Raja has grown big now and it was very difficult to accommodate in the house and decides to leave Raja in some zoo or to put him to sleep. Finally, John's parents decided to leave him in the zoo.

In the novel, the parents undergo divorce, and the boy John is separated from his pal Raja. After some years, John discovers that his father is about to sell Raja to some remote animal trainers, who could prove even more

dangerous for Raja. Upon hearing this, John is hurt and he feels why people could not understand the animals.

So, he sets out to save Raja from his father's plot.

Part of me wanted to find my father right away and ask him what was going on. But another part of me knew that would be a mistake. He'd say he was stuck. That he was out of money and had to sell the house and didn't have any other options. My body jolted to life. All the long-building muddiness in my mind vanished. Because I knew what to do. (*Rescued* 50)

John starts to surf the internet to find out the FriendlyLand in the computer:

FriendlyLand seemed to be mostly carnival rides, but the website said it also had over two hundred *Fun Animalz 4 U for just 10dollarz or 8 with a Monster can!!* It was right along the highway, and an image search showed a random mix of captives: toucans, hyenas, goats, and one patchwork baboon, all in tight, small cages (*Rescued* 71).

News about the FriendlyLand:

I typed FriendlyLand into a search engine. The third link in the list led to a photo of two foxes curled around each other. It wasn't until the text finished loading that I realized those foxes were dead. An animal rights group had been trying to get the zoo shut down; apparently its captive animals regularly died or disappeared (*Rescued* 71).

The condition of wild animals in captivity is revealed in FriendlyLand: "...dozens of monkeys recently seized from the wild to become captives, infected with diseases or bashed in the head or sprayed in the face with detergent or whatever human industry had in store" (*Rescued* 178).

In the beginning, human beings captured wild animals from their habitat and form a zoo and allow human beings to visit the zoo and the zoo owners earn money from it. In this novel *Rescued* John's father gifts John, an orangutan named Raja from Indonesia. Animals in captivity lead a painful life. Human beings need to see animals with concern. Animals that are struck up in cages are physically and mentally affected. The zoo owners exhibit the animals and it is a state of pride for the zoo owners. The idea of zoo indicates the concept that animals should live in domestication, irrespective of their natural habitat. It is believed that human beings have created an enormous change in the natural environment due to the concept of zoos.

In the wild the orangutans, “Wild orangutans spend five years with their mothers, and by the time they go off on their own, the young ones have mental maps of which trees are fruiting at what times of the year. It is hard for released orangutans to catch up if they never had mothers teaching them how to survive out in the first place” (*Rescued* 218). Orangutans live in community as a family. The mother orangutan teaches their baby orangutan and nurtures them. They closely associate with one another and they live a happy life in the wild.

The Sumatran orangutans are Indonesian orangutans and it was the first ape to go extinct. “The orangutans will continue to lose their habitat, and without habitat they cannot survive” (*Rescued* 224). The habitat of animals is continuously been exploited by poachers and many other people and the population of orangutan is also lowered.

Captive animals lose its true self and they are puppets in the hands of their owners. Stress is the main reason for animals to behave in an unnatural way. Animals are also affected by stress like human beings. Animals are meant to be in their own habitat instead they are forcefully taken from their environment and meant to be in captivity which causes stress to them.

In *Rescued*, as John was afraid of what those new animal entrapments are going to do to Raja. So, he took risk and meet Raja. But, initially Raja was not reactive to John’s visit, because Raja has struggled a lot during the years of separation, which John eventually understands and somehow, he gains the attention of Raja:

At the tone of my voice, Raja finally reacted and looked right into my eyes. His orange hair was mussed, falling over his brow. For a heart-jumping moment his glaze lifted, and he was my Raja again. Then he lowered his head and tugged at the elephant's trunk. He put his feet together so they made a basin, then face-planted into it.

(*Rescued* 59)

Animals are not amenable to captivity; it is possible that the polar bear is one of those species. People know the home ranges of such animals, and they know their behaviour in the wild. So, it stands to reason that people know that the imprisonment is not the right place for them. For the predators, to be one of the other things in a confined habitat and environment, they cannot fulfil a very basic need of theirs which is to hunt. So, if the predator-prey relationship is distorted and whilst of course, it would be very stressful to be a prey animal.

It is also part of their biological makeup and that is living in herds and interacting with their surroundings were all taken away. For instance, taking an elephant. An elephant has evolved to live in an elephant's environment. It has not evolved to cope with what goes on and it might cope given certain provisions, but it could be coping with what people really want to. People may want these animals to cope or they do want them to have a good life. It depends on about giving them the opportunity to live a good and natural life. This is why the neighbouring animals looked at Raja while he is escaping with the help of John, it looked like a miracle to them.

Finally, in the end of the novel John realized that Raja, belongs to be in the wild and he take efforts in sending Raja to Indonesia to be in the wild. Immanuel Kant says, He who is cruel to animals becomes hard also in his dealings with men. We can judge the heart of a man by his treatment of animals.

Animals are also living beings like human beings except the sixth sense. Animals too deserve a safe place to live on this earth. Definitely FriendlyLand is not a place for animals who love to live in a natural environment by eating fruits and sleeping on the grass. Animals are not meant for performing in the zoo performing for human audience. Human beings are responsible for killing animals for their valuables from their natural habitat to live in captivity.

Animals are extremely lovable creatures. They are more humane than most humans. Animals show unconditional love towards their caretakers. Animals are inseparable from their own environment.

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