



(Re)Creating Eden: An Ecocritical Reading of Romesh Gunesequera's *Reef*

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Abstract

Reef by Romesh Gunesequera was published in 1994 and was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in the same year. Now an adult in exile in London, the novel's narrator remembers his Edenic childhood in Sri Lanka in the post-independence era of the 1960's, when at the age of eleven he became an apprentice houseboy for a marine biologist, Mr. Salgado. Mr. Salgado is concerned about and obsessed with the fast disappearance of the coral reef in Sri Lanka. The paper originates from the way Gunesequera enmeshes the environmental concerns with the ethnic rivalries and the disturbed political and socio-economic situations in Sri Lanka, a country that was on the verge of its transition from a colonial economy to a neo-liberal, market-driven economy. The novel is interspersed with utopian longings and a desire to recreate the long lost Eden, the (im) possibility of which has been subtly questioned by the author himself. Although the characters in the text verbally discuss revolutionary strategies to conserve and save the eroding coastal ecosystem, yet nothing substantial is done in the end, just like the miserably failed governmental schemes that were supposed to protect the marine ecosystem but had ended up in wrecking greater havoc and had rendered thousands of people homeless. Finally, the paper will engage in examining Gunesequera's use of irony to perfectly capture the gap between 'theory' and 'practice,' desire and responsibility, power and agency and how in so doing, he has been successful in offering a critical view of the environmental degradation, which, often, is the result of the ethnic and developmental policies of Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Coral Reef, Ecological Concerns, Eden, Environmental Degradation, Utopia

