

**Ecocritical Perspective in Michelle Cohen Corasanti's
*The Almond Tree***

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Michelle Cohen Corasanti

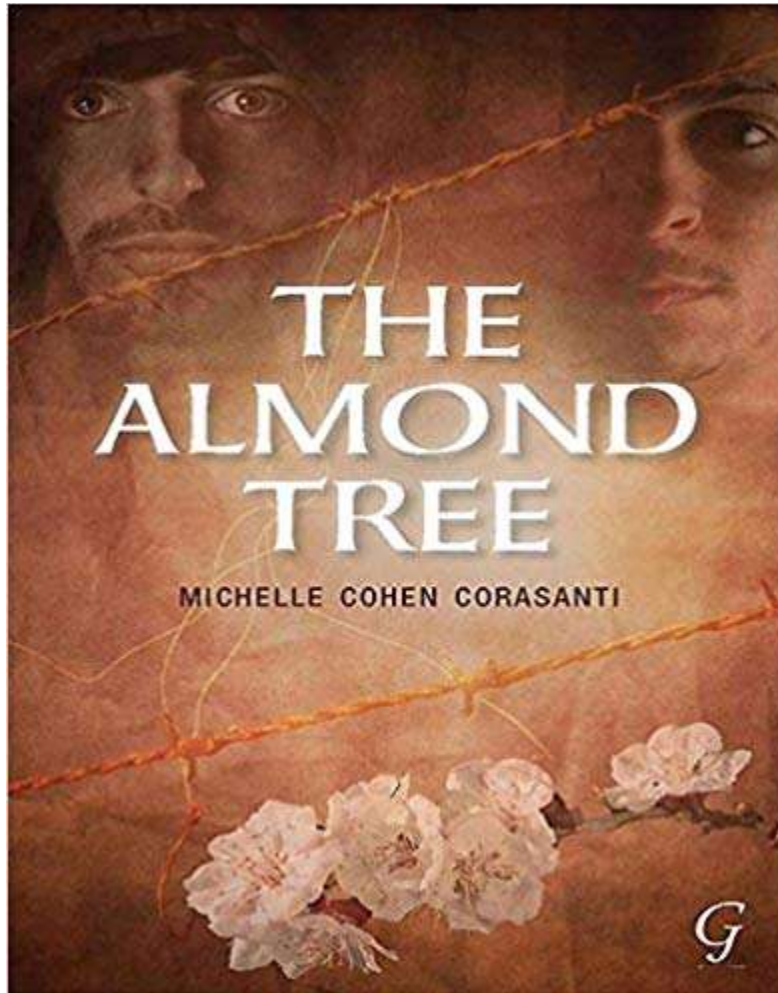
Courtesy: <http://thealmondtreebook.com/author-michelle-cohen-corasanti/>

Abstract

Ecocriticism is commonly called as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical world. Behind all ecocritical work, the awareness is that human actions must be held accountable for the damage of the earth's ecosystems. The human world has always considered nature as its inferior and abused in the name of progress and civilization with self-imposed power and authority over the world of nature. Ecology and Ecocriticism are now the significant aspects for the literary study and research. This paper reads the Ecocritical perspectives in Michelle Cohen Corasanti's *The Almond Tree* in which the writer advocates the balanced co-

relation between nature and mankind. The novel also focuses attention on the value of environmental balance for the survival of human beings.

Keywords: Cohen Corasanti, *The Almond Tree*, Ecocriticism, Nature, Environment, Land mining, Devastation.



Courtesy: https://www.amazon.com/Almond-Tree-Michelle-Cohen-Corasanti/dp/1859643299/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1348151595&sr=8-1&keywords=the+almond+tree

Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism is often used as a catchall term for any aspect of the humanities addressing ecological issues but it primarily function as a literary and cultural theory. As Glotfelty and Fromm 1996 famously states, “Ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies rather than an anthropomorphic or human centered approach” (xviii). Ecocriticism is an interdisciplinary calling for collaboration between natural scientists, writers, literary critics, anthropologists, historians and so on. Ecocriticism examine the way we interact with and construct the environment which is both “natural” and “manmade”.

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 18:7 July 2018

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Two Waves of Ecocriticism

Several scholars have divided Ecocriticism into two waves. The First wave is characterized by its emphasis on nature writing as an object of study and as a meaningful practice. The primary concern in First wave Ecocriticism was to “Speak for” nature. The Second wave is particularly modern, and it breaks down of some of the long-standing distinctions between the human and non-human. This wave redefines the term ‘Environment’ by expanding its meaning to include both ‘nature’ and the ‘urban’.

Ecocritics

Ecocritics try to examine human perception of wilderness in a more accurate way. They believe in the depiction of environmental issues of the contemporary scenario in popular culture and modern literature. William Rueckert was the first person to coin the term ‘Ecocriticism’ and used it as an essay titled “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” published in 1978. Ecocriticism is not like Feminist and Marxist criticisms because it has failed to crystallize into a successful movement like the other movements in late 1970s. But it became a coherent movement in USA in the 1990s and after that in many parts of the world including India.

Lawrence Buell defines Ecocriticism as “a study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmental praxis” (20). Many writers have contributed to this fields and Michelle Cohen Corasanti is one among them who has shown her concern for environment in *The Almond Tree*.

Michelle Cohen Corasanti

Michelle Cohen Corasanti is the Jewish American author of *The Almond Tree*, a novel that examines the plight of the Palestinians of Israel and Gaza through the eyes of a boy named Ichmad Hamid. Corasanti lived in Israel for seven years where she attended the Hebrew University and saw the horrors and humiliations Palestinians are subjected to on a daily basis, a tale of innocence moving through a vicious world, compassion learned against an environment of daily horrors and wisdom forged through a boy’s journey through a difficult life. Corasanti’s personal experience of living in Israel for seven years, her Undergraduate degree from the Hebrew University and her MA from Harvard as well as being a lawyer trained in International and Human rights law gave her the perspective, insight and ability to craft this story. Corasanti’s novel brings humanity and clarity to Arab-Israel conflict exploring themes of redemption, family sacrifice and the benefits of education and tolerance. Along with all these, one could see the threads of ecocritical elements in this novel.

The Almond Tree - The Normal Tree

The Almond Tree can be retitled as *The Normal Tree* as the tree is a witness to the normal daily atrocities by the Israeli occupiers of Palestine. Being a Jewish American writer, Corasanti has depicted the sufferings of Palestinians and the atrocities of the Jews in this novel. The author condemns the exploitation of people as well as natural resources by the Jews in Palestine. She has reflected her views in the novel which shows her strong condemnation against ecological exploitation. The writer showcases the consequences of nature exploitation in many ways and construction of land mining is one among them. She has tried to focus on the humanistic as well as emotional aspects of it.

Corasanti's Experience

The Almond Tree details the experiences of Corasanti – what she had seen, heard and experienced. The novel is about the power of love, the price of hatred, and the possibility of redemption. It is a sweeping story of family, love and friendship told against the devastating backdrop of half a century of conflict. Almond tree is a potent symbol of new beginnings and God's watchfulness. The almonds signify goods of life corresponding to the truths of good of the interior natural. Here Corasanti makes the title to show humanity at its worst and at its best. The title itself shows the writer's love for nature and the environment. The protagonist of the novel is Ichmad Hamid and the story revolves around him and his family. His struggle against a tyrannical rule, his patience, courage, determination, and his optimism to fight and win against all odds of nature are depicted in a natural way. It can be considered as a moral novel as it is based upon the principle that each individual should consider it as a moral duty to fight legitimately with the other, the oppressor and the oppressed.

In the novel Corasanti has highlighted the misuse of natural resources by the Jews as a result of planting of land mining, the most devastating activity by human beings. The Jews represents the oppressor, exploits nature as well as human resources as they want to possess Palestinian wealth as much as possible and want to keep them under their control. It is the story of Palestinian-Israeli conflict for a land which is spiritual for both the communities. So, the conflict is between the Oppressive power represented by Jews and a courageous Palestinian boy who struggle alone for his family and people. Throughout the novel, the writer employs techniques to critique the narrow-minded world views of Jews and their profit-making motive. In the present scenario the people are only concerned about making money without bothering of moral and human values and responsibilities.

Ecological and Social Imbalance

The story's main ideological conflict is established in the beginning itself, that is, the conflict between the self-surviving, hardworking Palestinian family and the military power of the Jewish State. The novel opens with the reality of death caused by the ecological imbalance. A child's playful act leading to her painful death because of land mining which affects the whole family. Thus, the beginning of the novel sets a pathetic scene before the readers. Though horrible, the writer, here, conveyed the harmful effects of land mining and the depth of pain caused to a family in the loss of their child.

Moral Responsibility and Suffering

Ichmad, the protagonist had a happy life with his parents, brothers and sisters till the age of seven. They owned a big house with a beautiful garden where the mother has planted beautiful flowers. But one day some soldiers came and took away everything from them. They fenced their land and home and they were forced to leave their place. They started to live in a mud-brick hut after the loss of their habitat and possession. Through these incidents, Corasanti portrays the ill-effects of accumulation of land by the Jews in the region.

The author has highlighted many problems of the Palestinian people, like the people from Ichmad's village were not allowed to dig deeper wells although they were the native people, at

the same time the Jewish people diverted the water from their village by digging deeper wells. As a consequence of Jewish land mining, the lands once filled with Olive trees become barren. Ichmad's father was not allowed to sell his oranges outside the village and his market shrank to just some thousand villagers. An innovative technique employed by Corasanti was that she used Almond tree as a witness to the whole story of the protagonist. And in this way, she has tried to fulfill her moral responsibility towards environment.

Devastating Natural Resources and Exploiting Marginalized Groups

The Almond Tree reflects the condemnation as well as protest of the writer against the people devastating natural resources and exploiting the marginalized groups. She has highlighted the plant of land-mining to exemplify the ill-effects of resource exploitation by the human beings. This work uplifts the image of Corasanti as a writer with moral responsibility towards the environment in which we survive. She has weaved the threads of ecological perspectives in a well-mannered way. On a deeper level, this novel shows the ecological thinking of the writer and her concern for humanity as well as environment.

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 18:7 July 2018

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