



Oceanic Belonging and Posthuman Identity: A Posthuman Ecocritical Reading of Disney's Moana

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Abstract: Disney's 2016 animated film Moana is analyzed here from a Posthuman Ecocritical perspective, looking into how Moana remaps the ocean not as a background that remains fixed but as a posthuman force of memory, identity, and opposition. built upon Posthumanism, Indigenous epistemologies, and the Blue Humanities, this study investigates how the film generates an oceanic sense of place and relational self created through more-than-human relationalities. Through an investigation of the ocean's symbolic and narrative functions, Moana's self-formation, and interconnectedness of land, sea, and self, this essay contends that Moana presents itself as a robust, decolonial eco-narrative grounded in Indigenous knowledge systems and ecocentric ethics.

Index Terms: Posthuman Ecocriticism, Blue Humanities, Moana, Indigenous Identity, Oceanic Belonging.

INTRODUCTION

Disney's Moana (2016) is a feature film written and directed by Ron Clements and John Musker. It is the tale of a Polynesian female who embarks on an oceanic journey to rebalance spiritually and ecologically for her island and family. At face value, the film can seem like yet another predictable hero's journey; but closer examination finds its investigation of Indigenous cosmologies and ecocritical consciousness, most especially, the ocean itself as an actor and the relational subject-ness of the hero. Embedded within the frameworks of Posthuman Ecocriticism and Blue Humanities, the book re-mediate Moana as a lowbrow children's fun on the one hand, and a cultural text addressed to urgent environmental and decolonial arguments on the other.

Posthumanism overthrows anthropocentric frameworks by decentering humanism and acknowledging the agential voice of the non-human. In ecocriticism, posthuman theories strive to make sense of the relational entanglements of the human and the more-than-human world. Blue Humanities in the minds of scholars such as Steve Mentz and Stacy Alaimo further conceptualize this by regarding bodies of water—seas, oceans, and rivers—as areas of memory, history, and ecologic importance. Pacific Island oceanic cultures have always been aware that the sea is a

living entity, an ancestor, and an archive. These epistemologies are enacted in visual narrative and offer counter-narrative to Western epistemologies of nature as object or passive.

DISCUSSION

Ocean as Posthuman Agent: The most powerful thing about *Moana* is certainly its depiction of the ocean as an interactive, thinking agent. The ocean is more than just a background for the action of the protagonist; it is itself an agent that chooses Moana, directs her, protects her, and ultimately becomes a part of her. In Posthuman sense, this might be argued to resonate with Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann's theory of "material ecocriticism," whereby matter—here, water—can be said to have agency and narrative power. The ocean in *Moana* tosses up Moana the toddler and carries her towards a shell, opens its waves for her to view her a pathway to it, and playfully puts her down on it. These actions place the ocean as a legend and possessing the power to engage into relations and be yearning. As a contrast to the work of an inert setting, the agency of the ocean offers a relational ontology at the heart of Indigenous cosmologies where nature is not differentiated from culture but requires being mixed up with community, history, and ethics. The sea's act of choosing Moana as the protagonist enlists her as part of an ecological line of descent wherein identity is constructed out of interspecies and environmental relatedness.

Indigenous Identity and Oceanic Belonging: Moana's voyage is not a voyage outward but an inner odyssey of self-knowledge, remembrance, and back-turning. Her island of Motunui discourages departing beyond the reef at first, indicating the ways should be forgotten. Yet, through wayfinding practices of restoration, Moana restores the history of her people as expert wayfinders. The return is not only historical—it is ecologic and spiritual. The return to the sea is a return to identity. In her essay "Voyaging for Anti-Colonial Recovery," Vicente M. Diaz explains how Pacific navigation and sailing is a process of decolonial recovery. Moana's voyage is likewise such a recovery process. Her relationship with the sea is not one of domination but of respect, interdependence, and compassion. The film upends the colonial narrative on its head by having the sea be a family and Moana a caretaker rather than a conqueror. Also, the figure of Te Fiti/Te Kā symbolizes nature's duality—creation and destruction, renewal and anger. As Maui appropriates the heart of Te Fiti, there is spiritual and natural unrest that follows. Moana's action in the return of the heart redeems Te Fiti but also returns a two-way sacredness between the nonhuman and human powers. This change indicates the end of an Indigenous ethic of care and regeneration, in which repairing the world is a synchronism with repairing self and humans.

Relational Posthuman Subjectivity: Posthuman subjectivity, instead of being bred out of the sovereign self, is imagined in relational entanglements with nature, other beings, and technology, claims Rosi Braidotti. Moana's subjectivity is formed in her entanglements with the ocean, with Maui (a demigod), and with Te Fiti (a god-monster). These entanglements announce the porous edges of human and nonhuman, divine and natural, self and other. Moana is constructed into a hero not by dominating or distancing, but by relationality, humility, and listening. She is constructed into a leader not by declaring the greatness of human beings but by embracing interconnectedness. That is very different from Western anthropocentric hero stories, where nature tends to get in the way to be overcome. Posthuman hero in *Moana* is a hero who works with, respects, and restores.

CONCLUSION

Disney's *Moana* is very revolutionary when understood through Posthuman Ecocriticism and Indigenous philosophy. It remakes the ocean not as passive but as energetic, living power in which memory and signification become central. *Moana's* self is not constructed alone but in dialogue with the ocean and its nonhumans. The focus of the film on ecologic balance, ancestral memory, and relational being resonates with new attempts at decolonizing environmental philosophy and reclaiming Indigenous epistemologies. By emphasizing oceanic return and posthuman being, *Moana* transcends children's cinematic fare—it is a decolonial ecotext that asks the viewer to reconsider their position in the web of planetary being. In times of greatest acuteness of the climate crises and the colonial lingerings of the past leave their traces, such texts are reminders as vital as our world is in need of repair, reminding us that it starts with reconnection—to land, to ocean, to one another.

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