

Maurice Druon's *Tistou and His Green Thumbs*: A Leap from Egophilia to Ecophilia

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ABSTRACT

An illegitimate son of a Russian Jewish immigrant, born in Paris on April 23, 1918 and one of the France's most prolific men of letters, Maurice Druon made a name for himself as a patriotic egophiliac. Through his critically acclaimed series of historical novels, *Les Rois Maudits*, and *Les Grandes Familles*, for example, he intended to revive the long-lost French medieval egotistic glory. With his wartime resistance hymn, "Chant des Partisans", which he and his uncle, Joseph Kessel, adapted from the Russian-born troubadour Anna Marly's lyric song, he infused a strong sense of ego in the French fighters against the German wartime occupiers. It was for all such contributions to nation building and for his unflinching determination to promote French linguistic and political culture that he was made Minister of Cultural Affairs in Pierre Messmer's cabinet (1973-1974), a Deputy of Paris (1978-1981) and a 'perpetual secretary' of the Académie Française. But in between his writing *Les Rois Maudits*, as he said in the preface to the story, he wanted to try his hands in something else and ended up writing *Tistou Les Pouces Verts*. This paper makes use of the properties of ecocritical theory in order to investigate the importance of Maurice Druon's stride from egotistic to eco-conscious writing meant for children.

INTRODUCTION

When one of France's foremost authors, Maurice Druon (1918-2009), passed away, most French literary journalists lavished glowing obituary notes on him. Catinchi (2009), for example, described him to be "a member of the Resistance, prolific writer, academician, [and] politician"¹ para. 1). While chronicling the watershed events of the life of Maurice Druon (1918-2009), she said that he was weak in mathematics, loved to indulge himself in literature and yet graduated from political sciences (para. 4). She also highlighted the fact that the author collaborated with his uncle and mentor Joseph Kessel (1898-1979) to recast one of the songs of the Russian-French song-writer Anna Martly (1917-2006), and that they ended up writing the lyrics of the war-time hymn "Chant des partisans", intended to galvanize the youth of the French resistance movement during the Second World War (para. 7).

Just like Catinchi (2009), Vaag (2009) dubbed him 'the darling of the Russians' while she also added, "The death of Maurice Druon on April 14, 2009 only a few days short of his ninety years has had a great impact on Russia where he was a very popular writer"² (para. 1). Even if Maurice Druon never really lived in Russia and never spoke a word of the Russian language, he seems to have a strange filial

connection to the country from where he father illegally immigrated to France sometime at the height of the First World War. Vaag (2009) also accentuated Maurice Druon's unsurpassed imaginative prowess to recreate a literary Russia in memory of his long-obliterated paternal roots (para. 9).

Indeed, both of the literary journalists stressed Maurice Druon's extraordinary ambidexterity with both pen and politics so far as the history of the Republic is concerned. The idea becomes even clearer if we look at a remarkable tribute paid by the then president of the Republic Nicolas Sarkozy, who styled Maurice Druon to be "a great writer, great member of the Resistance, great politician, great pen and great heart"³ (Agence Presse France, 2009, para. 1). However, none of them spotlighted a very important aspect of Maurice Druon's literary vision; despite his active participation in the Second World War, Maurice Druon was an incurable pacifist with a disillusioned prescience of the worldly Armageddon, and would envisage to bring about a green revolution through his ecocritically informed novel *Tistou and His Green Thumb* (1973). In this paper, I would like to foreground his ecoconscious literary predilections that underpin the novel and that I think need to be discussed all the more at a time when the world has finally woken up to the urgencies of the preservation of the biodiversity of the Earth.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a dearth of literature on Maurice Druon. However, the scant source of literature that we have on the author suggests that he garnered a universal acclaim, primarily for his egoistic writings, and that his fame was not confined to the frontiers of his homeland. Outside the Republic of France, Maurice Druon seemed to have received the highest accolades in the United Kingdom that conferred upon him one of its most prestigious titles ‘The Knight Commander of the Order of British Empire’ (Académie Française, 2009, para. 1) in recognition of his anglophilia, his promotion of English culture, and in particular, his role in World War II. Indeed, most of his writings are dedicated to the disinterring of the systemic corpus of the historical archival knowledge on French and English warfare, so Martin (2013), one of Maurice Druon’s notable friends, writes in a panegyric, “[Maurice Druon’s novels have] iron kings and strangled queens, battles and betrayals, lies and lust, deception, family rivalries, the curse of the Templars, babies switched at birth, she-wolves, sin and swords, the doom of a great dynasty and all of it (or most of it) straight from the pages of history” (para 4). Martin (2013) went on to call Druon “France’s best historical novelist since Alexandre Dumas” for all his “contemporary novels, short stories, a history of Paris and an amazing seven-volume series about King Philip IV of France, his sons and daughters, the curse of the Templars, the fall of the Capetian dynasty, the roots of the hundred years war” (para 2). That Maurice Druon was an incurable egotistic steeped in French history is self-evident in his everyday dealings and communications with other people. Speaking of Charles de Gaule, President of France, his leader and his political mentor, he is reported to have said, “Tall and straight in his uniform and leggings, he seemed to me like a medieval knight, majestic and determined”⁴ (Bionniel, 2018, para. 21).

In the United States of America, Maurice Druon was seen as an embodiment of a paradox verging on bewildering consternation. Weber (2009) wrote in a eulogy published in *The New York Times*, “Mr. Druon was known as a cultural conservative who argued against relaxing the historical gender assignments given to all French nouns” (para 7), so he thought it injudicious to refer to a woman minister as ‘la ministre’ rather than ‘le ministre’. As ‘le ministre’ is a masculine noun in French, Weber wrote in the same article that Maurice Druon wanted it to remain unchanged even when a woman occupies the post. But Weber (2009) found it contradictory, as he says towards the end of the article, that “Maurice Druon was also, from his World War II days, an Anglophile, and he allowed many English terms into the French lexicon, including ‘tweed’ and the golf term ‘birdie,’” (para 7). To be sure, for such a stringent stance on the preservation of the purity of the language, Druon emerged to be “a pugnacious defender of French language” as the Britain’s newspaper *Independent* (2014, para. 1) entitled him in incisively critical terms.

Whether in France or outside the country, the halo of such formidable reputation that surrounds Maurice Druon’s personality emanates generally from his feats of valor, bravery and gallantry through his participation in World War II

and particularly from the magnum opus of his literary oeuvre comprising of more than 50 novels, essays and works of fiction with different nuances of personal, national and religious egotism in their hearts. If we want to fathom the quintessential nature of Druon’s egophilia, Le Goff (2004) said that we will have to put his medieval egotism in the perspective of his contemporary society as he quoted Paule Petitier as saying:

Le Moyen Âge ne fait sens que dans le couple antithétique qu’il constitue avec le monde moderne dans une histoire fondamentalement critique puisqu’elle introduit toujours la perspective de l’altérité, même lorsqu’elle s’efforce de reconstituer de l’intérieur une époque. (p. 391) [The Middle Ages makes sense only in the antithetical couple that it constitutes with the world modern in a fundamentally critical history since it always introduces the perspective of otherness, even when it strives to reconstruct an era from within.]

As a matter of fact, this has precisely been the guiding principle in the egotistical works of Maurice Druon: he recreates the past after the fashion of the modern world. In his article “Le Moyen Âge ou l’Autre Scène”, Gally (2019) observed, “Maurice Druon lends his historic characters an interiorisation and a sensibility that are all modern” [“Maurice Druon prête à ses personnages historiques une intériorisation et une sensibilité toutes modernes”] (p. 6). While comparing Maurice Druon’s writings harking back to the long-lost medieval glory with some of the Italian authors, Falconieri (2017) went so far as to posit that the motif of according the requisite modern sensibilities to the historic characters is not particular to only one or the other novels of Druon but it has pervaded through all of his works of fiction (p. 4).

There is, however, one novel, *Tistou and his Green Thumbs*⁵, which is a surprising exception to the norm, and will accord you a welcome respite from the irresistible torrent of egotistic saga. While commenting on the exceptionality of the work in the preface of the novel, he says, “One day, between my writing two volumes of *Les Rois Maudits*, I amused myself by indulging in a literary genre that I had not yet approached and that was far removed from all my other works”⁶ (1973, p. 357). Indeed, the novel is so ‘far removed’ from the rest of his works that scholars, in all probability, considered it a fragmentation from the continuum of his stupendous body of works and did not deign to give it any critical attention. In an *Encyclopedia Britannica* entry, Fadiman (2021) has only this much to say, “*Tistou of the Green Fingers* (1957; Eng. trans. 1958), a kind of children’s *Candide*⁷, demonstrated how the moral tale, given sufficient sensitivity and humour, can be transmuted into art” (para 1) while the novel has the potentials to be interpreted in any number of ways.

METHODOLOGY

In order to fill the underserved void of critical examinations on *Tistou and His Green Thumbs*, we set out to give the novel an exciting reading in the rest of the article from the ecocritical point of view, one of the latest literary and critical ven-

tures in today's general and comparative literature. As such, we will make use of such tropes as the dwelling, the pastoral, the wilderness and the apocalypse which form the bedrock of the theoretical lens of ecocriticism to "the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xix) and make the most of the newly emergent ecocritical vantage point. However, one of the central premises of the article is to argue that Maurice Druon not only wanted to envision in the novel a world where a healthy environment thrives alongside the human habitat but also seemed intent on writing for children. We will therefore establish the nexus between ecocriticism and children's literature towards the end of the article.

A QUEST FOR ECOPHILIA

The first thing that we will take into consideration while interpreting the novel from the ecocritical point of view is the trope of the georgic model of dwelling. For innumerable ecocritics, "it implies the long-term imbrications of humans in a landscape of memory, ancestry and death, of rural, life and work" (Garrard, 2012, p. 117). While explicating the way this model of dwelling will exactly fit the landscape of a novel, Garrard (2012) also postulated, "[This style of living] idealises a free, land- and slave-owning farming citizenry as the foundation of the American republic and extols the georgic virtues of industry, thrift and measured self-interest" (p. 119). The central tenets of the model will definitely furnish us with some telling insights into the ecological configuration of the setting of *Tistou and His Green Thumbs*. The magnificent house that Monsieur Père, Madame Mère and Tistou inhabit, to take just one example, has "several floors with a porch, a veranda, a large staircase, a small staircase, high windows lined up in rows of nine, turrets capped with pointed hats and all around a superb garden" (Druon 1973, p. 367). At a distance, and close to a nearby bush, is their stable where they 'feed' nine horses, each one more beautiful than the other. On Sundays, when there have some relatives paying them visits, the group of servants who hover over them all the times install the nine horses in the garden to adorn the landscape already fringed with exquisitely beautiful scenery on the horizon. It all points to a self-contained, cloistered and insouciant life within the house, symptomatic of the georgic way of the world.

As a georgic model of dwelling, Mirepoil, the little township in which the grand house of Tistou's parents is located is no less amenable to an ecocritical interpretation. It has, for example, its own church, prison, army garrison, grocery, and tobacco and jewelry shops (Druon, 1973, p. 371). The day Tistou falls asleep in the midst of his lesson in a class at school, Monsieur Père, who has already proven himself a person of discernment, thinks it wise not to send him to school anymore and wants him to learn his life lessons in the perfectly manicured garden, the well-minded shops and the undefiled pasture of nature (Druon, 1973, p. 380). As envisaged by the father, Tistou turns out to be a community- and eco-conscious individual, so he once steals his way out of his bed into the garden in the middle of the night to plant seeds that will sprout into big beautiful trees at some point

in the novel. Indeed, at the end of the novel, Tistou remains cleaving to both the memory and soil of these places as part of his education so as to meet the quotidian challenges of life, living up to the spirit of a community that "must collect lives and stories, turn them to account", and that "must build soil, and build that memory of itself...that will be its culture" (Berry 1980, p. 154, as in Garrard, 2012, p. 115). This style of philosophy is even truer in the life of Monsieur because, despite having everything in perfect readiness at his disposal to make sure that he, his family and his animal population live in luxury and comfort, he has always exercised "the georgic virtues of industry, thrift and measured self-interest". Perhaps as a result of all the real-life, aesthetic and abstract trappings that they enjoy, Monsieur Père thinks it inconceivable for them to relocate to a bustling city, which is essentially redolent of the georgic bent of mind.

And yet the fame of the township rests in the main on Monsieur Père's arms factory, which has also been at the origin of the burgeoning fortune of the locality. When Tistou is not hungry, Madame Mère usually makes him count the nine chimneys spewing out giant clouds of smoke into the air. Inside the industry, Monsieur Père makes his workers produce 'guns of all calibers, big, small, long, pocket guns, guns mounted on wheels, guns for trains, for airplanes, for tanks, for boats, guns to shoot above the clouds, guns to shoot underwater and even and even a variety of extra-light guns made to be carried on mules or camels in countries where people grow too many stones and where roads taper off' (Druon, 1973, p. 371). While the georgic model of dwelling seems to be an inexhaustible source of what Garrard calls "an endless plenitude", the erection of an arms factory in the midst of the georgic paradise provokes a "a fundamental ambivalence...with a kernel of irremediable guilt" (Druon, 1973, p. 56). The interruption of pastoral peace with the setup of a 'dangerous' industry can be likened to the georgic system of vassalage, which will lead us to the trope of American pastoral characterized by the relentless efforts to mediate between competing values; untouched rural spheres and technological onslaught; and bountiful natural prerogatives and suffocating slave industry.

Many a character of the novel betray ambivalence emblematic of the American pastoral trope, too. For one thing, while everyone leads a contented existence in the cloistered society of Mirepoil nestled between plain lands and forests, no one seems to pay any particular attention to the care of nature. In other words, as "American writing about the countryside emphasizes a working rather than an aesthetic relationship with the land" (Garrard, 2012, p. 54), so do most characters in the novel turn a blind eye to the question of environmental care. In some cases, they exhibit an unyielding obstinacy to comply with the regulations for the preservation of the environment and even mock Tistou bent on finding an antidote to the perils of life through the plantation of trees. Some of them go so far as to single him out for his avowed arboreal interest and tout him "as not others" (Druon, 1973, pp. 376-377). For another, upon discovering the seeds of plants sprouting everywhere, and all the important places in Mirepoil pullulating with their flowers, most

municipal members stagger their colleagues by voicing their inability to respond to the latest development of the township. The narrator at this point inveighs against them and says, “The Municipal Council is like a cleaning lady of the town” (Druon, 1973, p. 412), who is completely stripped of the aesthetics. Enjoying such privileges from nature and showing a blithe disregard for it that are thus exemplified to be coeval “provides a pejorative edge to ‘pastoral’” (Garrard, 1973, p. 54) in the novel.

Druon does even not spare the people of the first order, who are sucked into the vortex of such contradictions. When Tistou, for instance, sows the seeds of diverse plants around the maximum-security prison of Mirepoil, the inhabitants of the little township wake up to the fact that something is happening unbeknownst to themselves. Botanists flock to the parish, dissect some of the newly sprouting trees and give themselves up to wild speculations on the origins of the flower plants even though they are all the upshots of Tistou’s works. Letting out a stream of invective to assail the indolent botanists, the narrator therefore says, “If there are an infinite variety of plants, there are only three types of botanists: the distinguished botanists, the reputed botanists and the eminent botanists” (Druon 1973, p. 397). Besides, Monsieur Trounadisse, who is entrusted with the responsibility of the security of the house, seems to be interested in the expressions pertaining to the realms of the ecoconscious, and yet he is apt to gleefully butcher parts of some collocations from usually accepted ecoconscious patterns and jam them into expressions contradicting an ecoconscious mental makeup. When Monsieur Trounadisse, for example, uses the expression ‘semer le désordre’ in the sense of ‘spreading disorder’ while elucidating to him the modes of punishment for miscreants, Tistou is completely nonplussed by the collocation because ‘semer’ (which means ‘to sow’ in French) has always seemed to him an essentially agrarian word (Druon, 1973, p. 388). The reason Tistou is constantly on the lookout for the discovery of semantic significations is because “in the wider field of ecocritical literary studies, there are scholars who see the relationship between nature and literature as dialogical and as crucially negotiated by rhetoric” (Lehtimäki, 2013, p. 125). All the same, speaking of the trope of the American pastoral as used in Leo Marx’s *The Machine in the Garden*, Cannavò (2001) found ‘international contradiction’ between rural life and sciences, and opines, “the fundamental approach to environmental problems is shot through with contradiction and is profoundly dysfunctional” (p. 83).

In addition to the American pastoral, the trope of Romantic pastoral that valorizes the life-giving, quintessentially salubrious and aesthetically pleasing properties of nature can also be applied to the study of the novel. The day Monsieur Père decides to send Tistou to have first-hand experiences about life under the tutelage of gardener Monsieur Moustache, he underscores the significance of trees to his son by saying, “A lesson on the garden is in actuality a lesson on a lesson on the earth which we walk on, which produces vegetables we eat, and which produces the herbs the animals feed on until they grow big enough to be eaten” (Druon 1973, p. 380). In saying all this, Monsieur Père not only underlines nature as a source of nourishment but also interdependence

between man and animal. On another occasion, when Tistou is on a visit to a hospital, he meets a child of his age passing her time bedridden and as an invalid. She seems to have lost all her hope. Tistou thinks it is important for her to start believing in her worth, looking forward to the future and moving on, so next day even before she wakes up from her sleep, Tistou plants some seeds around her hospital bed. To the surprise of everyone, and even the doctor, the child-patient begins recuperating. On yet another occasion, when Tistou spreads the seeds of plants everywhere, the whole township is bestrewn with their saplings of all sizes, creating a wondrous tessellation; therefore, the town council convenes an urgent meeting to rechristen the township from Mirepoil to Mire-Les-Fleurs (Mire-the Flowers), a move reminiscent of Tistou’s father initial philosophy that “the earth is at the origin of everything” (Druon 1973, p. 380).

Just like the Romantic pastoral, the trope of the classical pastoral proves itself resourceful to an informed ecocritical reading of the novel. “We set out”, said Garrard (2012), “three orientations of pastorals in terms of time: the *elegy* looks back to a vanished past with a sense of nostalgia; the *idyll* celebrates a bountiful present; the *utopia* looks forward to a redeemed future” (p. 42). All the three notions of the classical pastorals percolate the cerebrally close-knit texture of *Tistou and His Green Thumb*. For one thing, Monsieur Père and Monsieur Moustache reminisce about the long-forgotten past with a certain sense of evocativeness and rueful longing, leaving to some degree an equivalent impression on the young impressionable Tistou in particular and on the receptive reader in general. The author describes all the incidents with a perfectly commensurate elegiac tone to enact the mournful yearning for the time irretrievably lost from them. For another, the whole village of Mirepoil regales itself at the spectacular spread of grains of flowers everywhere while it also enjoys the idyllic bounty of material riches (Druon, 1973, p. 384). Within a very short span of time, the grains of flowers sprout and blossom, adding to the décor of the whole village. The narrator talks of the consequences of the event of inflorescence to Tistou thus, “Imagine the amazement of the Miropoilus (as the inhabitants of Mirepoil are called) by discovering their prison transformed into a castle of flowers into a palace of wonders”⁸ (Druon, 1973, p. 394). The narrator seems to be carried away by the ubiquitous presence of the newly blossomed flowers when he says, “There is neither a prison window, nor a bar that hasn’t received its fair share of flowers! The stems climbed, twisted, fell; cacti on the crest of the walls replaced the frightful prickles everywhere”⁹ (Druon, 1973, p. 394). For still another, there is of course the expectation of Monsieur Père and Monsieur Moustache in teaching Tistou that his learning of gardening will transform the whole village into a seamless natural and fraternity-inducing garden. This is how, the three tropes of the classical pastoral metamorphoses *Tistou and His Green Thumbs* into “the novel whose plot builds towards a climactic confrontation, and the poetry of concentrated revelatory lyric intensity” (Kerridge, 2014, p. 364).

At the heart of Druon’s *Tistou and His Green Thumbs* is also the proclivity for wilderness which generally stands for “the ‘undomesticated’” (Buell, 2005, p. 148). In particular,

the concept of wilderness signifies the pristine condition of nature unspoiled by human civilization. "Unlike pastoral", said Garrard (2012), "the concept of wilderness only came to cultural prominence in the eighteenth century, and the 'wilderness texts' discussed by ecocritics are mainly non-fictional nature writing, almost entirely neglected by other critics" (p. 59). As the earliest proponents of the idea of wilderness, Edmund Burke and most Romantic poets found peace, tranquility and unbounded freedom in wilderness and imagined the intimations of wilderness in the sublimity of mountains, highlands, lakes and virgin forests. Like them, Druon portrays a mountain range, in mint condition, adjoining the estate of Monsieur Père. If the sublime has to do with the way wilderness "shapes the internal, the emotional, the spiritual" of a hero (Bolt, 2015, p. 19), the wilderness that Tistou finds at his disposal reconfigures his spiritual makeup. He finds his strength in the standing upright of the mountain range, his uncompromising commitment to life in its inflexibility and his promise to honesty in its power to withstand the vagaries of nature. He finds the inspiring qualities of the sublime aplenty in the garden, the greenhouse and the farm, too. When he, for example, averts his attention to the palm trees of their greenhouse, imported from Africa, he can sense a symbiotic relation with the distant land he has never been to (Druon, 1973, p. 381). No wonder this is probably why Monsieur Père wants Tistou to learn life lessons from nature before any more formal education at school begins.

As opposed to anthropomorphism putting humankind at the center of literary portrayal, Druon's *Tistou and His Green Thumbs* promotes ecocentrism that "hinge[s] on how well literature represents the natural world" (Phillips, 1999, p. 587). First of all, Druon probably does it by making a positive attitude towards nature prevalent throughout the novel. For example, when Tistou sees a thick moustache of Monsieur Moustache, he compares it to "an extraordinary forest, the color of snow, [which] grew under his nostrils"¹⁰ (Druon, 1973, p. 380). At times, Druon advocates the ecocentric virtues by making most characters love and care for animals. The horse Gymnastique, for instance, is the cynosure of all attention. All the family members, including Monsieur Père, Madame Mère and Tistou, devote an extraordinary amount of time to the care of him. Gymnastique also receives particular treatment on Sunday which is a weekly gala day in the family, so to speak. At other times, when Tistou thinks no grownup understands him, especially on the eve of the all-out war between the Vazys and the Vatents, he confides all the developments within the family and without in Gymnastique who he thinks communes with him out of a big gesture. However, unlike some ecoconscious authors giving unwarranted preferences to animals over humankind, Druon's standpoint somewhat reflects the proposition of Eckersly (1992) who held, "The world is an intrinsically dynamic, interconnected web of relations" where there are "no absolute dividing lines between the living and the nonliving, the animate and the inanimate" (p. 49, as cited in Buell, 2005, p. 137). It is tantamount to the proposition of Pythagoras in his *The Metamorphosis* who "proselytizes ... for his doctrines of mutability, the animistic universe, and the animal soul, before reiterating his plea to treat animals with compassion" (Borlik, 2011, p. 205).

In line with the religious premonitions that the world is barreling towards an inexorable ending, primarily due to the ignorance and insensibly execrable deeds of its inhabitants, ecocriticism also has an apocalyptic narrative portending a host of ramifications for ill-conceived human actions. This unstoppable mad rush into the doomsday has been aptly defined by Thomson (1997) in an attempt to expound the idea underlying the concept of the apocalypse in ecocriticism:

It was mapped out in a new literary genre called apocalypse, from the Greek Apocalypstein, meaning 'to unveil'. Apocalyptic literature takes the form of a revelation of the end of history. Violent and grotesque images are juxtaposed with glimpses of a world transformed; the underlying theme is usually a titanic struggle between good and evil (pp. 13-14 as in Garrard, 2012, p. 86).

Indeed, the apocalyptic narrative in ecocriticism, which proposes to "unveil" the absolute spoliation of the world civilization in the form of unprecedented devastating consequences in the wake of the catastrophic Armageddon, presupposes a certain degree of gradual transgression on the part of humankind. This transgression seen in the grand scheme of the time might assume multifarious forms, including perpetual warfare, climate change, deforestation, extreme river administration, and others only for some ephemeral, undue favors. In Druon's *Tistou and His Green Thumbs*, too, there are a few extremely important episodes featuring an imminent warfare between the Vazys and the Vatents and a menacing extermination of both the races. Too naïve to understand the psychological complexity of the grownups, Tistou is not sure about why men should fight over the expanse of a desert land denuded of the lush green vegetation and significant biome (Druon, 1973, p. 424). While he ponders the meaning of the Vazys and the Vatents, which sound in his ears like the French words "vas-y", come on, and "va-t'en", go away, Monsieur Trounadisse points out that the war does not loom large over them merely for the desert but for what lies underneath it. In other words, they are locked in fight over petroleum (Druon, 1973, p. 424), a revealing indication of the world political interest and its mercenary military engagement in the Middle East, which has in recent times been a battleground of innumerable modern warfare.

What appears to be even darker and more foreboding is that the war is not going to be limited between the two nations. The Vatents have already called on the other nations for support and reinforcements so that they can share among themselves the booty once the petroleum is completely extracted. Besides, both of the nations showcase the best of their weaponry on their respective national dailies in a guilefully hectoring attempt to cow each other in an early subjugation. Although Druon apocalyptically does not let an imminent destruction loom large over the nations in order to offer "a vision of a sudden and permanent release" from the otherwise easily avoidable captivity of the embattled communities (Thomson, 1997, p. 14, as in Garrard, 2012, p. 86), he makes Tistou feed flowers into the muzzle of the war tanks, an eco-effective rhetoric designed to work out a cerebral solution to humankind's prejudiced environmental thought (Lindgren, 2007, p. 119). Even though the brewing

apocalypse does not descend on the well-manicured garden of the ostensibly cloistered countries, it leaves them with the pangs of a harrowing experience that will provide the citizens of the nations with intellectual fodder to think through their environmental problems.

RAISON D'ÊTRE FOR HIS QUEST FOR ECOPHILIA

One of the numerous reasons Maurice Druon should find himself a place in the pantheon of the eco-conscious literary aesthetes, even while immersing himself in the somewhat chauvinistic glorification of French medieval and modern history, is his nonpareil creation of the stripe of fiction ingeniously impregnated with the arresting qualities of ecocriticism. Even if Druon says to have embarked on the worthwhile ventures of writing the novel out of his sheer wanting to enjoy the respite, it has showcased the veritable willingness of an ecocritically conscious author committed to bringing about a revolutionary change in the way we perceive the symbiotic nexus between humankind and nature. The apt point Michèle Goslar (2007) made about the eco-consciousness of Marguerite Yourcenar would be worth pondering in this regard:

Si lo político puede ser definido como voluntad de incidir en el comportamiento de un grupo de individuos, puede decirse entonces que la preocupación constante ... por el porvenir de los animales y la naturaleza fue de carácter político. Esta preocupación por el respeto de la vida en todas sus formas se manifestó desde sus primeros escritos (p. 37).

[If the politics is defined as a willingness to affect the comportment of a group of individuals, it can then be said that the constant concern for the future of animals and nature was [sic] of a political kind. This concern for respecting life in all its forms manifested itself beginning with his first writings].

Indeed, the concern for the “*porvenir de los animales y la naturaleza*” [the future of the animals and nature] seems to have been a driving force behind the creation of Druon’s work of fiction offering a vision articulated through his marvelous piece of well-wrought children’s literature. The vision is well grounded in the belief that the world is not “*la terre des hommes*” [the earth of men], a concept prevalent in the French society for a long time (Sanz p. 139), but the world belongs to all the living creatures. Despite being only one piece of work in the grand oeuvre of literary, patriotic and historical work, *Tistou and his Green Thumbs* provides us with “ample food for thought about the increasingly pressing need to find ways of preserving the community of all living things for generations to come” (Sanz 2017, p. 149).

SYMBIOSIS BETWEEN HIS ECOPHILIA AND CHILDREN’S LITERATURE

As well as being committed to the pursuit of the eco-conscious philosophy that permeates the novel, Druon seems to have made an exceptionally important stride towards the formation of an ecocritically informed children’s

literature in France at a time when the country, like most other European nations, passes over the environmental concern. It is probably because “Contemporary literature for children demonstrates even more clearly the return to the more biocentric pastoral anticipated by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers and currently being discussed by ecocriticism” (Sigler 1994, p. 150). As Escalante and Caldera said (2008) in their beautifully written article “*Literatura para Niños: Una Forma Natural de Aprender A Leer*”, a work of fiction intended for children should be replete with a myriad of exciting episodes, and “these events full of melody, vocabulary and images constitute the language that allows the child understand the world and the place he occupies”¹¹ (p. 670). Druon foregrounds the story of a young boy poised to be initiated to the life of the grownups, carefully adding any number of details germane to the environmental question in order to inculcate in the kids of his age the indubitably obligatory importance of being respectful to all the living beings on Earth. Why does Druon decide to invest his time, energy and creativity in children’s literature, and preach his ecocritics-illuminated philosophy through this newly emergent mode of writing? Children’s literature is the hitherto undiscovered terrain that have fascinated many scholars in the recent times as Tames (2013) explained in his seminal work *Introducción a la Literatura Infantil*:

It seems that in our time the child you get care you did not have before. Psychologists, pedagogues, sociologists, dedicate their efforts to this protagonist of care. He has achieved an autonomous world, his world, and has ceased to be mere hope of a grown man¹² (p. 13).

Given the proposition expressed in the quotation, it might seem that Druon is simply one of the many authors wending the already well-trodden path of children’s literature. But if we put into perspective his work, his initiative and the time in which he wrote the novel, evidences will point out that he was a pioneering literary figure envisioning a more habitable world than it was at a time when the deliberate incorporation of ecocritical tropes into children’s literature was not simply the order of day.

Since the first appearance of Druon’s *Tistou and His Green Thumbs*, children’s literature has much evolved over the years. “The frontiers of literature”, said Cervera (1992), “are widened within the framework of children’s literature, and its concept is refined by denouncing that not all publication for children is literature”¹³ (p. 10). Druon arrogated to himself neither the qualities of an author writing for children nor those of an eco-crusader in his lifetime. And yet the evocative images he has moulded, the riveting plot that he has forged and the masterfully wrought worth-retelling storyline that he has concocted have prepared the ground of his emergence as a bellwether of eco-sophisticated writers in French literary history of modern and early times. In addition to the form and formulation of the novel, Druon has orchestrated diverse ideas pertinent to his theoretical positionings underpinning his work, and seems to have envisaged a real change in the world, in the attitude of the people, young and old, who inhabit it, and in the way practically everything pertaining to nature should be treated in the future. As a matter

of fact, the experiences that the protagonist as well as readers go throughout the novel are so diversified that *Tistou and His Green Thumbs* has become an “enciclopedia mágica de la infancia” or a veritable magical encyclopedia of childhood (Giacone, 1989, p. 8).

CONCLUSION

As is evident from the preceding discussion, Maurice Druon exercised a profound political clout on the inner recesses of the French nation's psyche. The motivating war-time hymn song that he and his uncle adapted catapulted him into an immediate stardom in French literary scene. Besides, the knighthood that the British royal family conferred on him for his extraordinary contributions to the provisions of the intellectual ammunitions during the Second World War gave him a ready exposure to international politics. In addition, the political positions that he held as a minister of cultural affairs, a deputy of Paris and a “perpetual secrétaire” of L'Académie Française confirmed his influential presence on the territory of the Republic. However, seen from the perspective of the overall configuration of his works, nothing would give Maurice Druon such a lasting preeminence as his ecocritical perspicacity that he demonstrates in the novel *Tistou and His Green Thumb*.

Writing at a time when most authors did not appear to be in a position to ward off the stranglehold of the harrowing consequences of the Great War, Maurice Druon challenged the commonly accepted mode of thought and went against the grain to create a counter-discourse in *Tistou and His Green Thumb*. It is true that the novel will look poor and shrunken when it is put next to the novels which he wrote to champion the political cause of the French nation, but the message of the peace and the ecologically balanced world that Maurice Druon preaches in the novel outweighs the egotistical braggadocio of some of his hefty political novels. Even though the author himself seems to have realized this form of truism in its quintessence albeit a little later in his life, the reader will understand that the novel, given its sensitivity to environment, warrants more and more investigations into Druon's long stride from his position of egophilia to that of ecophilia in the time to come.

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

ENDNOTES

1. “ Résistant, écrivain prolifique, académicien, homme politique, Maurice Druon est mort mardi ”.
2. “ Le décès de Maurice Druon, mardi 14 avril, à quelques jours de ses 91 ans, a eu un grand retentissement en Russie où il était un écrivain très populaire ”.
3. *Le président de la République, Nicolas Sarkozy, a rendu hommage à l'académicien Maurice Druon, décédé aujourd'hui à l'aube de ses 91 ans, en le qualifiant de “grand écrivain, grand résistant, grand homme politique, grande plume et grande âme.”*
4. “ Haut et droit, dans son uniforme et les leggings, il m'apparut comme un chevalier du Moyen Age, majestueux et déterminé ”.
5. *Maurice Druon's Tistou Les Pouces Verts has been translated from French into English in many different ways, such as Tistou, the Boy with Green Thumbs, Tistou: The Boy with Green Thumbs, Tistou of His Green Thumbs etc. But, all the translations in this article are mine, and I have entitled the book in English Tistou and His Green Thumbs.*
6. “ Il m'amuse, un jour, entre deux tomes des Rois Maudits et comme pour me détendre, de m'essayer à un genre littéraire que je n'avais point encore abordé et fort éloigné de tous mes autres ouvrages ”.
7. *A philosophical tale commonly hailed as a diatribe against the complacency prevalent in the Age of Enlightenment.*
8. “ Imaginez la stupeur des Miropoilus (ainsi se nomment les habitants de Mirepoil) en découvrant leur prison transformée en château de fleurs en palais des merveilles ”.
9. “ Pas une fenêtre de la prison, pas un barreau qui n'eut reçu sa part de fleurs ! Les tiges grimpaient, s'enroulaient, retombaient ; des cactus, sur la crête des murs remplaçaient partout les affreux piquant ”.
10. “ Une extraordinaire forêt, couleur de neige, lui poussait sous les narines ”.
11. “ Estos eventos llenos de melodía, vocabulario e imágenes van constituyendo el lenguaje que le permite al niño entender el mundo y el lugar que él ocupa ”.
12. “ Parece que en nuestro tiempo el niño recibe una atención que no tuvo antes. Psicólogos, pedagogos, sociólogos, dedican su esfuerzo sobre este protagonista de cuidados. Ha conseguido un mundo autónomo, su mundo, y ha dejado de ser mera esperanza de hombre adulto ”.
13. “ Las fronteras de la literatura se ensanchan dentro del marco de la literatura infantil, y su concepto se depura al denunciar que no toda publicación para niños es literatura ”.

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