

Exploring the Ecological Imagination: The Intersection of Environment and Literature in Contemporary Discourse

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Abstract:

This paper investigates the intersection of environment and literature by focusing on ecological imagination in contemporary discourse. Across the interdisciplinary approach that deals with Ecocriticism. By examining the ways in which literary texts engage with ecological themes, landscapes, and narratives. It will try to shape the role of literature in the perspectives of environmental awareness and activism. Through case studies of selected literary works and critical analysis of literary trends and movements, this paper illustrates the diverse manifestations of the ecological imagination in contemporary literature and its significance for addressing environmental concerns. This study contributes to a deeper appreciation of the complex relationship between literature and environment, highlighting the transformative potential of storytelling in envisioning sustainable futures.

Keywords: Literature, Ecology, Environment, Ecocriticism, Sustainable.

Contemporary literature continuously reflects concerns about the environment by exploring a natural relationship between human discourse and the ecological world. The 21st century has witnessed an increasing awareness of environmental problems, ranging from pollution, biodiversity, depletion of resources, and climate change. By focusing on these issues, the contemporary literary genre has produced a powerful medium for articulating human relations with the environment. This study explores how contemporary literature nurturing to environmental themes by portraying the seriousness of attention towards environmental friendly and sustainability. The intersection of environment and literature in contemporary literary discourse posed some crucial questions about ethics, responsibility, and the future of life on Earth. By demonstrating this relationship between all living beings and the fragility of ecosystems, literature fosters ecological consciousness and makes an effort for collective action to address environmental challenges.

By understanding the natural relationship between man and environment, contemporary literary discourses focus on the concepts of environmental criticism or Ecocriticism. In other words, the study of literature with environment, its commonly known as Ecocriticism. It denotes the interconnectedness of literature and natural world. We can call it our mother-earth, portraying in literary studies. Ecocriticism, a globally originated movement that came into existence as a result of environmental disaster by the dominating attitude of humans towards nature. This eco-centered study of literary phenomena develops an approach to eco-conscious.

The term Ecocriticism closely resembles green studies; both terms are used to denote a critical approach that began in the late 1980s in the USA and in the UK in the early 1990s. As a literary movement, genre or theory, Ecocriticism began in the late 1970s in USA. Its beginning trace in an essay by William Rueckers as entitled, "Literature and Ecology :An Experiment in Ecocriticism (1978).. This concept was earlier known as 'the study of nature writing' by some critics. But it was Cheryll Glatfelter who incorporated this critical study as a movement. Glatfelter and Harold Fromm founded an Association for the Study of Literature and Environment in 1992. A journal entitled Inter-Disciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment (ISLE) is owned by the organization. A collection of some seminal essays - The Ecocriticism Reader: Literature in Literary Ecology (1996), edited by both Glatfelter and Fromm.

In the USA, this movement took its inspiration from some of the major 19th-century American transcendentalists, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Margaret Fuller. Their writings are generally cited as relating to natural wilderness, life force, and biological degradation. All of them are considered as the informal group of New England writers, philosophers, and essayists, and they are basically known as transcendentalists. Nature, a collected essay of Emerson, was published in 1836. In all of his essays, he expresses his emotional attachment to nature, his mother, and the impact of the natural world on him. Thoreau also gave an account of his two-year stay at Walden, from 1845 (and published an essay with the same title), on an island that he had built at the bank of Walden Pond. Margaret Fuller's book deals with the powerful imagination of her encounter with the American natural landscape in summer on the Lakes During 1843.

Thus, we can easily connect the American transcendentalists with English romanticists. It's their classic example of an attempt to renew the concepts of 'return to nature'. These three essayists and their works can be seen as the foundational beginnings of American 'nature-centered' literary writings. From their excerpts, we can see the love for nature in Walt Whitman's mystical poems. In UK, the ecocriticism considered as Green Studies because it affects from Romanticism in the late 18th century. However some notable concepts founded by major critics of this era like Jonathan Bate, composed in 1901, Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition. Raymond Williams's The Country and the City (1973) is concerned with articulating ecological themes. However, Ecocriticism has not made sufficient progress, as in the USA. Laurence Coupe, contributes by his seminal study of environment in approaching to ecocriticism in 2000, "The Greene Studies Reader: from Romanticism to Ecocriticism.

There are some debates also emerge within the ecocriticism movement and the mystical interconnectedness between nature and culture because Ecocritics denied the chief poststructuralist notion of everything constructed within society or languages, whereas ecocritic believes that nature exists in reality or truth only; it can not be textualized or a part of social discourse only. Peter Barry points out, "It is out there, beyond ourselves, not needing to be ironized as a concept by enclosure within knowing inverted commas, but actually present as an entity which affects us, and which we can affect, perhaps fatally, if we mistreat it"(243). Barry further explains it by giving an example related to topography. He refers to it by distinguishing the multiple manifestations of nature, as it is commonly understood as a manifesto in parks, gardens, and lands that are destroyed by the large-scale pollution of human culture in nature.

While romantic poets and American transcendentalists always incorporate nature in their poetry, the school of Marxism finds fault with the poets of the 18th and 19th centuries, like Wordsworth and Thomas Gray. The Marxist approach towards nature is that inequality brought into society by human culture is produced by nature. The poems of Thomas Gray, such as "Elegy Written in a Country

Churchyard" (1751), and Wordsworth's "The Prelude" (1805), which depict poor people in the embrace of nature, are thought to be shaped by bourgeois philosophy, are supposed to be formed with bourgeois philosophy. Here, we should recall Peter Barry's quote, "Nature is the name under which we use the nonhuman to make humanity more easy with itself" (44-45).

This anthropogenic approach can be seen in the Bible also when God tells Man, "to fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living that moves on the Earth " (Genesis 1:28). All the vegetables, fruits and herbs which are produced by nature on the Earth, is for the humans only. The scientific study of the planet also reflects the survival of mankind over this land is controlled by nature, as William Hogarth's essay, "Some Principles of Ecocriticism": "A source of both hope and fear, science presents solutions that only generate engineering: should we destroy all defective genes? To some critics, such questions suggest that scientists too often ignore the policy implications of their discoveries " (79). Nature writing aims to awaken humans and to infuse in man the spirit of kinship. The notion of kinship rejects the attitude of the Darwinian approach to reading nature in which might is right. There is no suspense that nature produced a world at once dark and bright. There is also the shadow of Byronic might and Wordsworthian nature that tosses about a ship and sends man into a meditative and peaceful mood. Regarding this concept, Greg Gerrard's observation needs to be quoted, "Despite the obvious prevalence of predation in the natural world, it is hoped that, if we imagine symbiosis is more common than competition, we will be inspired to build more cooperative societies. The peaceful, mutually beneficial coexistence of algae and fungi in lichens, or mitochondria and cytoplasm in human cells, is no doubt, an example to all" (8). Some of the other Ecocritics go with the scientific science and natural science produce literature also as a source of energy. In this regard, William Reuckert remarks, "to discuss or read or study literature, is to gather energy centers around a matrix of stored poetic/verbal energy. In some ways, this is the true literature field because the energy flow is not just a two-way flow from poem to person as it would be in reading; the flow is along many energy pathways from poem to person, from person to person. The process is triangulated, quadrengrulated, and multiangulated, and there is, ideally, a rise in the energy levels, which makes it possible for the highest motives of literature to accomplish themselves. These motives are not pleasure and truth but creativity and community (110-111). French Feminist Francoise d'Eaubonne coined the term ecofeminism in 1947 to represent women's prospects to encourage the movement of ecological revolution, to develop a new relationship between men and women and between humans and the environment in the name of securing human persistence. Some ecofeminism like Greta Guard and Patrick D. Murphy discourse portrayed ecofeminism as "based not only on the recognition of connections between the depletion of the natural world and the maltreatment of women across clerical societies" but also "on the recognition that these two forms of domination are bound up with class exploitation, racism, colonialism, and neocolonialism "(Ref. 90, pp. 2-3).

The modern literary discourse is beset with environmental disasters, and literary critics are currently interconnected with the ecosystem. To continue the fight for global ecological problems, it seems that science and technology are not sufficient. The attitudes towards nature had to change. Literature does not exist within fantasy and imaginary worlds, but it does have some purpose. Since the beginning of Ecocriticism as a literary genre, critics did not give enough attention towards natural disasters, it deserved. Hence, ecocritics writing explores a deeper knowledge of being environmentally oriented. Increasingly, Ecocriticism originated as a "global movement". William Rueckert coined the term Ecocriticism in a critical article entitled "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism "(1978).

The word 'eco' originated from the Greek term 'Oikos,' the word stands for 'home or earth,' and 'logy,' derived from 'logos,' means a logical argument. These terms are interconnected to literary representations of home-environment study as a form of interdisciplinary issues, with a wide scope focusing on environment sustainability. There is a book, "Ecocriticism and Early Modern English Literature " by Borlik, which mentions that Elizabethan and Jacobean writers surely acknowledged and were aware of how nature is affected by human actions (Todd, 2012). With the help of literary composition, ecocritics try to give the needed attention to the connection between humans and nature (Singh, 2019). Some critics believe that there are basically two phases of Ecocriticism in English Literature. We can mention the first phase, which is the basis of nature writing, wilderness romances, and the foundation of realism and pastoral poetry. The second phase is followed by the wider subject matters of the first phase. It broadly affects agriculture and wild spaces rather than the wilderness romances of the first phase. Burberry, a postcolonial ecocritic, similarly shifts his research upon postcolonial major issues. The era suffers the problems of starving, dehydrated, banished, and homeless people all across the world (Mabie, 2016).

Munthir M. Habib reveals in his article, "Nature, Environment and Landscape in Modern British Poetry," that the aims of eco-centric study of modern British poetry help to develop a strong environmental consciousness in some poetic collections of T. S. Eliot and Edward Thomas shown a widely accepted attention over the disruptive changes in the human nature relationship and Edward Thomas appeals to have a meaningful contact with the natural world (Habib, 2020). Robert Frost, an American poet, played a prominent role and contributed to eco-critical concerns towards nature in his poems like Birches and The Road Not Taken, and so on, poetic compositions that can be considered an eco-centric approach.

Many Romantic critics represent women's potential in their works by cleverly drawing a comparison between women and nature. The mother figures of Dorset and Howitt expose the young reader to the natural world. While Howitt conveys Wordsworthian women enjoying mother - nature, Dorset appeals to the importance of emotion in women's existence in the same way as in nature, a distinct spiritual connection between the natural and human world. The late Romantic poet London emphasizes female perspectives that explore women's existence in public and private spheres of mid 19th century (June, 2004).

Ecocriticism is diversely indicated by eco-friendly, sustainable environments or green studies. Subsequently, it might be outlined that ecocritics do not bind up with the social or linguistic constructedness of the societal norms. The environment can exist in its own way as all living beings have a right to natural surroundings for their persistence and permanence. It is a process of reading the texts that incorporates environmental-friendly and concerns with major issues. The ecocritics attempt to pay special attention to the representation of the natural world. By focusing on the ecosystem, energy, and symbiosis, they aim to emphasize how nature sustains novels, poems, essays, and other literary genres. The ecocritics investigate the connection between theoretical and realistic notions of natural issues.

The study of literature from the perspective of ecological imagination is popularly known as Ecocriticism. Therefore, it can be summarized that there is not a single sphere in this universe that can be untouched by the impacts of Mother Nature. All the human sciences and psychology are linked together to analyze environmental science and try to solve the problems of environmental situations, e.g., global warming, etc. The moral and philosophical aims of Ecocriticism are to rapidly broaden the scope

of Ecocriticism; as such, the emergence of nature writing or green studies has a distinct and substantial place in the literary genre.

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