

Ecocriticism in Modern English Literature

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Abstract—Ecocriticism these days is indeed a relatively new revisionist and reformist trend that has dominated the ecological point of view in recent English literature worldwide. The ecological perspective constructed under Eco-criticism delineates the nature-human alliance in both detrimental and constructive ways. The present research paper tries to inspect some post-1900 modern English literature from an Ecocritical perspective. The literature reviewed in the present study incorporates the analysis of some well-known authorship whichever is eminently written to gain insights from the ecological frame of reference. Analyzing some notable works culminates in the conclusion that the trend of Ecocriticism progresses from 'nature- a mystic substance 'and 'nature's interconnectedness to action 'importance of maintaining nature, 'eco-consciousness and eco-literacy about environmental issues, and finally calls to action.

Index Terms—Ecocriticism, Eco-consciousness, Ecological, Modern English Literature, Environmentalism

I. INTRODUCTION

English literature as global literature has followed multiple trends. The trends involved various socio-human issues, one of which is prominent, is the environment. Broadly, the multidisciplinary field of study known as ecocriticism examines the relationships between literature and the environment. In analyzing the distinctions between nature and its cultural creation, it draws on the works of natural scientists, authors, literary critics, anthropologists, and historians. (<https://www.science.smith.edu/climatelit/ecocriticism/>).

It deals with the presentation and analysis of environmental concerns, environmental-related cultural issues, and attitudes toward nature. Studying how people behave and respond in their cultures toward the environment and ecological issues is one of ecocriticism's key goals. The rising social emphasis on environmental degradation and advancements in technology have drawn a lot of attention to this type of criticism in recent years. Thus, it offers a novel approach to reading and understanding literary works that expands the scope of literary and theoretical research. The environmental movement and the release of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962 sparked the emergence of ecocriticism, but it wasn't until the 1980s that it truly took off. Ecocriticism has so far come in two waves, the first in the 1980s and the second in the 1990s. The first wave focused on nature writing as a discipline of study and as a worthwhile activity. While upholding the separation between humans and nature, it also emphasized the worth of nature and the necessity of speaking out for it. The following wave extended the scope of environmentalism by building on the first. This wave of ecocritics attacked the differences between nature and non-nature, as well as between urban and natural environments, and redefined the term environment to encompass both. (<https://www.coursehero.com/file/119437943/MODULE-29-ECOCRITICISM-Idocx/>)

By analyzing how the poorest and most disadvantaged segments of a community are most vulnerable to the negative consequences of climate change and environmental degradation, this wave also sparked the eco-justice movement. Pastoral, wilderness, and ecofeminism are all included in ecocriticism. Ecocriticism is a blend of literary criticism of ecological approaches or parameters used by the author in his/her work. Ecocriticism is a relatively new revisionist trend that has dominated humanity in recent decades (Oppermann, 2016). The trend can be prominently seen in early and late modern English literature through the works of various authors. Most early ecocritics praised 'nature writing', and promoted writers who attend to and extol the beauties of nonhuman species and creatures. When the environmental movement began to gather political force during the 1970s, ecological literary criticism grew into activism, and led to the spread of eco-consciousness and awareness. Various texts in the modern era (post-1900) offered the changing trends in this manner (Westling, 2016).

Romantic writers from the United Kingdom and America wrote about their ecological consciousness from three perspectives: living community, and basic ecological awareness of environmental conservation. They explain the true meaning of beauty in nature, define the beauty of harmony with nature, promote getting back in touch with nature and the beauty of people, and expose a natural road that leads to truth, goodness, and beauty for those who are seeking their

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spiritual home. They also urged people to protect life and use natural resources responsibly while expressing their sincere concern for the environment and natural resources (Jin, 2022).

The current research paper aims at analyzing and reviewing the Ecocritical approaches of selected literary works published in modern (post-1900) English literature of various forms, prominently poetry, and novel. This paper also provides a background of the Ecocriticism movement and a literary review of the changing eco-critical approaches in selected English literary texts.

II. QUESTION OF THE STUDY

- Q1 How does Eco-criticism delineate the nature-human alliance in both detrimental and constructive ways?
Q2. How modern English literature from the post-1900 era is inspected from an Eco critical perspective?

III. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The present study is a fresh fulfillment of the Ecocritical approach to criticism that investigates humans' modern English Literary texts' nature after 1900. It also examines how Ecocriticism progresses from 'nature- a mystic substance', 'nature's interconnectedness to humans', 'importance of maintaining nature, 'eco-consciousness, and eco-literacy about environmental issues.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

The modern world is beset with environmental disasters, and the ecosystem is currently in jeopardy. To fight the global ecological issue, science and technology alone are insufficient. Modern attitudes toward nature had to alter. Literature does not exist in a vacuum, but it has a purpose. For a long time, literary critics did not give nature the attention it deserved, therefore environmentally-oriented writing implores a deeper knowledge of nature in its broader context. During the last three decades, Ecocriticism has emerged as a "global emerging movement." In a critical article published in 1978, William Rueckert coined the term Ecocriticism, in an article named "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism." The term 'eco' is derived from the Greek core term 'Oikos,' which means 'home or earth,' and 'logy,' which originated from 'logos,' which means it is a logical argument. They are closely related to literary representations of home-environment critique (Mishra, 2016). As just a multidisciplinary subject, its scope is vast and limitless, with a focus on long-term sustainability. Borlik in his book "Ecocriticism and Early Modern English Literature reveals that Elizabethan and Jacobean writers were acutely aware of and worried about how people's actions affected the natural world (Todd, 2012).

Ecocriticism delineates nature and human behavior toward it at a certain time in the history of literature. The study of the link between literary and physical settings is known as Ecocriticism. Ecocriticism is a literary approach that focuses on the environment. Through literary works, Ecocriticism tries to bring attention to the need to reassess man's connection with his environment (Singh, 2019).

According to Buell, there were two waves of Ecocriticism in English literature and the subject trend remains young. The first wave has been based on nature writing, pastoral poetry, wilderness romance, and the foundation of realism, logocentrism, and historicism. It was the restoration of a wild and natural (non-human) environment. Second-wave Ecocriticism became the broader subject matter of first-waves. It had an activist side, suburban, agricultural, and heavily managed wild spaces were considered environment, rather than extreme wild as in the case of first-wave Ecocriticism. A similar shift has been agreed upon by Burberry (Mabie, 2016). Postcolonial Ecocriticism has recently gained popularity. With the rise of postcolonial Ecocriticism, there has been a larger interest in postcolonial literature. The postcolonial tranche ecocriticism has emphasized the concerns of starving, dehydrated, banished, homeless, ill, and imprisoned people all across the world (Mabie, 2016).

In his article "NATURE, ENVIRONMENT AND LANDSCAPE IN MODERN BRITISH POETRY", Munthir M. Habib concluded that the ecocritical reading of modern British poetry has revealed a strong environmental consciousness. Both Edward Thomas and T. S. Eliot have shown deep anxiety over disruptive changes in the human-nature relationship and Edward Thomas appeals to have meaningful contact with the natural world (Habib, 2020).

Jeon, Deuk Ju, in his dissertation stated that Many Romantic writers represent women's potential in their works or cleverly draw comparisons between women and nature. The mother figures of Dorset and Howitt expose the young reader to the natural world. While Howitt conveys Wordsworthian delight in enjoying nature's animals while emphasizing the relevance of humor akin to Joseph Meeker's notion of comedy for survival, Dorset emphasizes the significance of emotion in human existence in the manner in which David Ehrenfeld employs it. According to Browne, there is a distinct spiritual connection between the natural and human worlds. The late Romantic poet Landon develops feminine poetics that examines women's standing in both the public and private spheres of mid-nineteenth-century England using figurations drawn from nature and the natural world (Ju, 2004).

The ecocritical view investigates various literary features of the work from a natural and cultural point of view. These features include (Das, 2020):

- Portrayal of nature in work.
- Geographical surroundings and their role in literature.

- Metaphors to nature and their relevance.
- How life forms are connected or interlined.
- How modern science/human actions/issues impact the environment and create eco-conscious.

Sepehri also has shown Ecocritical perspectives in his poems and travelogues around 1920-30. In his poems such as 'Eight Books', 'The bird', and 'Passenger', he is a proponent of the spirit of nature, emotional dilemmas, and mysticism in life. He connects nature with human ambitions, for example,

"And love, only love He took me to the breadth of sorrow,
it made me the possibility of becoming a bird. And a drink of sorrow?"

The pure sound gives an elixir to this drink" (Sepehri, 1389, p. 293). He connects the joy of love to belongingness to nature. He regarded nature as a living entity and treated it as a healer of man, a moral guardian in his works. He used natural visuals to make poetry a presentation. The characters show a human-nature relationship, with nature being superior. Sepehri shows how a sympathetic attitude towards nature is necessary in times of distress or disaster. The Ecocritical view describes that the solace that man cannot find in urban life, can be sought in the natural world according to Sohrab Sepehri (Dabirnia, 2021).

William Butler Yeats has been quite famed for the use of Ecocritical views. His ecological poetry is part of Ecocritical views. He followed the spiritual lines of nature and infused his writing with sacred places. For instance, in his poems like '**The Towers**', '**As in The Wild Swans at Coole**' and the introductory verses to '**Shadowy Waters**', the natural world in 'The Stare's Nest by my Window' brings the speaker back to his true purpose and presents the path to spiritual recovery. While not a poet of 'deep ecological' convictions, Yeats brings his keen observation of landscape features, birds, and animals of the Irish countryside to his work. The poems, more than representations of landscape, reveal the interconnectedness between the cultural realm and the natural world, between literature and the way it is informed and inspired by place. The focus here is on building, creating, and nurturing. The poem is an exhortation not to lose connection to nature with its healing powers: the natural world teaches the poet about new life (Fleming, 2020).

Thomas Hardy is another poet and author whose work is widely seen from an Ecocritical angle. The poem 'The Breaking of Nations' and the novel 'Far from the Madding Crowd' are some of his analyzed texts. Thomas Hardy's works conjure up images of a peaceful, beautiful world in which man coexisted along with the surroundings. Thomas Hardy had favor for Romanticism, confidence in Darwin's concepts, and also cared for sympathetic harmony of individuals and ecology, creatures residing with man, and humanity - human civilization relations. These are all examples of the ecological consciousness that he depicted. Other than the love story, most of 'Far from the Madding Crowd' is devoted to landscape and country culture. Hardy's poetic and beautiful focus on the values latent in the environment and Wessex contrasts with Weatherby's rural setting as well as urban society. Characters such as Gabriel Oak and others live in a local environment where nature plays an important role in their happiness. Hardy's ideals would be environmentally informed, and readers would be contributing to environmentalist thinking in the hopes of honoring and maintaining nature (Heidar, 2016; Barry, 2017).

Robert Frost has also been one of the celebrated American poets who contributed prominently to eco-critical concepts in poems in the post-1930 era. "**Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening**", "**Departmental, Design, Nothing Gold Can Stay**", "**The Road Not Taken**" and many more poetry works by Frost, assume an Ecocritical approach.

Frost always designs them intending to educate people about their connection to nature and other living things. For example, the lines

"And there's a barrel that I
didn't fill
Beside it, there may be two or
three Apple
I didn't pick upon.
But I am done with apple
picking now" (Frost, p.3-6)

The poem illustrates that the fulfilments or non-fulfilments of unending wants have no bearing on human experience, which is prone to death and deterioration, and that they are solely responsible for their agony and pains. This contributes to the spiritual dimension of eco-criticism once again. It raises ecological consciousness and knowledge of the different ecological issues by sensitizing people's attitudes toward nature (Shrivastwa, 2020).

V. METHODOLOGY

The present research paper follows the argumentative approach in order to achieve the intended objectives behind it. The study then tries to examine and study Modern English literature post-1900 era from an Ecocritical perspective. The Researcher will review some well-known authorships, which were eminently written to gain insights from the ecological frame of reference.

VI. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. *The Trend of Eco-Criticism Post-1950*

Wole Soyinka is a Nigerian author and playwright who has built his plays based on an ecological proposition. His works 'The Swamp Dwellers' (1958), and 'A Dance of Forests' (1960) describe the situation of Yoruba tribes. His works divulged how Yoruba's present generation is disconnected from nature. In his works, the protagonist represents Man as unable to fight nature and tracked by the physical charm of the city leaving the village. To be an agriculturalist, one has to extend friendship with nature. He opined that the love for nature should be eternal and that floods and droughts cannot evade it, but that turns out to be unfavorable because human beings have to distance themselves from nature. This marks the view that human engagement with the non-human world is excessive, and the situation is quickly deteriorating, which is the main reason for the current environmental issues. Soyinka's works spread eco-consciousness, which shares concern for the environment and displays a growing awareness of environmental issues (Ravindran & Maithri, 2018).

Graham Swift's novel '**Waterland**', published in 1983, was one of several British novels to be cited by ecocritics as an instance of literary studies that could be interpreted in an Ecocritical manner in the postmodern era. This novel was examined from a hitherto unknown critical intersection that is of Ecocriticism. For example, Serpil Oppermann put forward the application of the "postmodern Ecocritical theory". She adds three fundamental characteristics to the novel: it calls into question hierarchical, dualistic systems, investigates the existence or lack of conceptions of nature in literature works' narratives, and highlights the language methods that underpin conceptions of nature. Armbruster claims that *Waterland's* demonstration of the cultural constructed-ness does not always negate the reality of a material universe. The concept of nature demonstrated in a text pushes Ecocriticism out of its "comfort zone." The true importance of the natural environment in *Waterland*, on the other hand, is understood only after careful consideration of what is depicted, and how literature and information pertaining form affect depictions of the Fenlands. The impact of fairy tales on Crick's Fenland stories is highlighted in *Waterland*, which always shows and indicates the landscape's geological fragility, among other things. *Waterland* is an exemplar where it highlights the seeping and meandering character of major personalities: the river Ouse, is a nonhuman personality, through its meandering narrative and a rather sluggish pace. The flooding that occurs throughout the work, according to Armbruster, mirrors modern concern regarding climate change's consequences, as seen by the mention of floods in England (2010) (Bracke, 2018).

B. *The Trend of Eco-Criticism Post-2000*

Jerry Spinelli's (2000) '*Stargirl*' shot across the young adult literary landscape. The book for young adults is part of the second wave of Ecocriticism. It is taken as "purely" Ecocritical reading, examines the relationship between the world of nature and characterization, and argues that *Stargirl* becomes a more rounded character. An Eco-pedagogical reading is more hopeful and holistic: it demonstrates that *Stargirl* ultimately conveys positive environmental values of Eco-literacy for readers to nurture within themselves. The characterization of *Stargirl* through imageries, similes, and symbolism of nature, avoidance of violence, and sexual characteristics bring her a resilient personality. For other characters, nature is also used as an influence. The Ecofeminist branch of Ecocriticism provides the view that *Stargirl* is nature itself. The main thrust of the novel is a call to action, hoping that younger people will emulate *Star girl's* action to protect the environment. It acknowledges diversity and a variety of actions and urges to practice kindness towards nature (Malo & Hill, 2020).

The Ecocritical approach is also found in children's literature. 'I Am a Hornbeam Branch', Hasan Ali Toptaş's solitary children's tale (2004), tells the story of the trees that live around the Beşparmak Mountains area and a hornbeam branch that grows with them and bears the anguish of aging as they grow mature. Given the importance of environmental awareness in development, 'hornbeam' is associated with a child's young imagination and discussions that may emerge from the environment it symbolizes. Eco-writing, inside the shape of children's fiction, has the potential to improve environmental literacy. It imagines nonhuman living worlds through the eyes of creatures, like a parallel universe that replicates behavior and connects with persons engaged, rather than as a sphere of absolute differences. All these men and matter get significance in the task when they are in an interaction with nature. Using ecological language, environmental issues are addressed both textually and graphically, and trees work as a metaphor to empathize with hornbeam's story making children eco-aware (Aslan & Bas, 2020).

McCarthy's novel '*The Road*' (2006) is especially informative in this sense because it describes how characters' modes of presence and emplacement should be restructured in the context of global disaster. McCarthy imagines in '*The Road*' that the severe degradation of the environment and issues due to it even serve to make abnormal embodiments of humans tortured to the level close to death as appealing, Bridging the dialectical correlation between the two- the subject individually and its environmental surroundings to the fore. This draws emphasis on the same principle fundamentally at the economic standard: that geography and physical ecology serve as the interaction of the human mind and the trial existence of humans and their surroundings. The goal of mind-body emancipation is consistent with the goal of environmental stewardship, which is one of the repercussions of this close relationship that delineates one of the prominent objectives of Ecocriticism (Cella, 2013).

VII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summing up, Ecocriticism has been considered a prominent branch of literary criticism, especially originating from American literature, and is still expanding. In the present research paper, the researcher has reviewed various modern selected texts of prominent authors and poets whose works have been reviewed from an ecological or Ecocritical point of view. The general trends found in modern to post-modern (post-1900) English literature are a shift from the nature-human interaction and nature-culture comparison to an awareness of environmental crisis and activism. Today's greatest issue for Ecocriticism is to address environmental concerns through nature literature, poetry, and wilderness storytelling. The agenda of Ecocriticism is centered on questions of equality and social justice. It looks at the role of vision and inspiration in influencing people's ideas, lives, policies, and creativity. Ecocriticism aspires to be both active and transformational. The pure Ecocritical transformation from nature as God to nature as something that needs to be protected can be seen from all studies reviewed here in a century (1900-2010). The trend progresses from 'nature- a mystic substance 'and 'nature's interconnectedness to human', 'importance of maintaining nature's-consciousness and eco-literacy about environmental issues, and finally 'call to action. Further research can be proceeded with the review of further literature, especially after 2000 and 2010, in detail to study the environment/nature concept and how it is interpreted in post-modernist English literature from an Ecocritical perspective.

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