



INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print):2321-3108 (online)

## CRITICAL ANALYSIS ON THEORETICAL PARADIGMS IN ECOCRITICISM

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### Article info

Article Received:01/8/2023

Article Accepted:15/09/2023

Published online:20/09/2023

DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.11.3.205](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.11.3.205)

### Abstract

This research paper delves into the realm of ecocriticism, offering a comprehensive exploration of its theoretical underpinnings and their implications for the study of environmental literature and discourse. Ecocriticism, as an interdisciplinary field, has gained prominence in recent decades for its capacity to illuminate the complex relationship between human culture and the natural world. Drawing from a diverse range of literary, philosophical, and ecological theories, this paper seeks to provide an in-depth analysis of ecocriticism's theoretical foundations and how they inform critical readings of environmental texts. This paper underscores the significance of ecocriticism as a theoretical perspective that not only enriches literary analysis but also fosters a profound understanding of humanity's interconnectedness with the natural world. It emphasizes the need for continued exploration and critical engagement with ecocriticism's theoretical foundations, as they are indispensable in addressing the pressing environmental challenges of our time.

**Keywords:** Ecocriticism, Environmental conservation, Deep ecology, Nature, Culture

### Ecocriticism- A theoretical Perspective

Ecocriticism has swept the ecological consciousness in the last several decades and is one of the latest revisionist trends. The fight against the global ecological crisis is not necessary only in science and technology. The approach to nature needs to be changed. Literature floats little further than life and thus has a part to play. Literary theorists have for a long time taken nature not properly into account so ecological theory requires that the environment be best interpreted in its greater sense.

Numerous forms of eco-criticism proliferate in the various sub-fields of eco-conscious research. Ecocriticism spreads the environment to the entire ecosphere. While eco-critical writings talk

to nature, all writing and works of literature are not eco-critical. The existence of a connection between the human and the non-human is usually the eco-critical foundation of the language. Ecocriticism promotes a greater interpretation of nature, which both interprets which reflects the natural world. It aims to protect the rights of humans to the environment.

William Howarth talks about the etymology of the term Ecocriticism in a chapter entitled "Some Principles of Ecocriticism" in the book *The Ecocriticism Reader*(1996):

Ecocriticism is a name that implies more ecological literacy than its advocates now possess unless they know what an embattled course ecology has run during its

history. Eco and critic both derive from Greek, Oikos, and kritis, and in tandem, they mean "house judge," which may surprise many lovers of green, outdoor writing. A long-winded gloss on ecocritic might run as follows: "a person who judges the merits and faults of writings that depict the effects of culture upon nature, with a view toward celebrating nature, berating its despoilers, and reversing their harm through political action." So the oikos is nature, a place Edward Hoagland calls "our widest home," and the kritos is an arbiter of taste who wants the house kept in good order, no boots or dishes strewn about to ruin the original decor. (69)

The term ecocriticism was initially used in William Rueckert's essay "Literature and Ecology: An Exercise in Ecocriticism" in 1978. But actually, it remained unused in the critical language until the 1989 conference of the Western Literature Association, when Cheryll Glotfelty was a graduate student at Cornell, now Assistant Professor of Literature and Environment at the University of Nevada, Reno. Glen Love, who is a Professor of English at the University of Oregon, has endorsed the call for ecocriticism at the same WLA meeting since that conference in 1989; the use of the word ecocriticism has bloomed. At the onset, however, scholars working in this area of literary theory remained marginal until the beginning of 1990, when the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE) was founded in 1992.

Since this was a new field, numerous thinkers and commentators used the method and style in different ways and thus defined the word 'ecocriticism in various ways. However, the various approaches usually focus on the connection between man and earth, since their fundamental issues are identical. Ecocriticism is an interdisciplinary analysis of literature and the environment, in order to examine the world in a systematic manner and find alternative ways to change the present situation.

The first American Professor of Environment and Literature at the University of

Nevada, Reno, was Cheryll Burgess Glotfelty. A huge number of other people may have been influenced by the major impact of Glotfelty on American studies ecological natural writing through her various conference papers and networking events. Greg Garrard writes in the introduction of his book titled *Teaching Ecocriticism and Green Cultural Studies* (2012) "Ecocriticism should be demandingly interdisciplinary. At the least, it requires engagement with the biological sciences, which was historically cross-fertile with literature until separation by Greg Garrard specialisation (and later outright hostility) developed in the course of the twentieth century."(5-6)

Since the start of literary studies, literature and the world have been discussed in one way or another. Recently, the area of ecocriticism took full form. Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin state in their book titled *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (2010) about ecocritical writings, "Since the 1990s, ecological issues have engaged a number of humanities scholars who regard them as not marginal but foundational to their disciplines." (16)

In the 1950s and 1960s, numerous groundbreaking studies laid the groundwork for that field. During the last decade of the 20th century, ecocriticism became a strong and structured field in literature studies. In the area of ecocriticism, *The Ecocriticism Reader*, published in 1996 in two leading volumes, *The Environmental Imagination*, edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Mr. Harold Fromm, and Mr. Lawrence Buell.

Cheryll Glotfelty states in the very first chapter of *The Ecocriticism Reader*(1996)

What then is ecocriticism? Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies. (xviii)

Eco-criticism is an analysis of the society and the cultural objects of the human race, which are linked to human interaction with the natural world, including literature, texts, theories, etc. Eco-criticism is, according to one's definition of urgency, a response to demands, issues, or emergencies.

The study of the relationship between literature and the real world is ecocriticism. Just as *feminism* looks at expression and literature from a feminist viewpoint and Marxism increases awareness of the modes of development and the economic system to its texts analysis, ecocriticism is an approach to literature. For example, Ecocritics study how nature is portrayed in the sonnet. In the plot of the novel, drama, and short tale, they discuss the role of the physical environment. Ecocritics investigate harmony with ecological wisdom of the principles embodied in practice. Greg Garrard writes in his book *Ecocriticism*(2012) "Ecocriticism is unique amongst contemporary literary and cultural theories because of its close relationship with the science of ecology."(5)

The environmental concerns of literary texts are the subject of ecocriticism. Any literary work can be examined from a green point of view. Analytical systems in many fields may be used in ecocritical research. The interdependence between human and non-life. Ecocriticism analyzes human and environmental inclusion of eco drama. Traditionally, drama scholarship and performance dominated the human experience. Humans exist in a network that is mutually related. Humans and land, birds, plants, trees have shared power. Ecocriticism offers a critical perspective on how human beings and their world are portrayed. It offers a fresh insight into cultural and political ideologies that form the basis of some of the past and present pressing social and environmental issues. It brings into question the institutional frameworks which produce and uphold social and environmental injustices. It encourages biological agriculture. Sustainable growth is preferred. It exposes prevailing philosophies that exacerbate the ecological crisis. If it is a play or a book, characters are environmentally placed.

Swarnalatha Rangrajan talks about the central goal of ecocriticism in the very first chapter of her book *Ecocriticism*(2018) edited by Scott Solvic

The term indicates a new geological era replacing the Holocene in which human agency has become a significant geophysical force at par with natural forces. Modifying the world's ecosystems with a greater rapidity than witnessed in any earlier period of human history. Finding new ways of responding to this planetary tragedy poses both a conceptual and representational challenge to humanistic scholarship. This is the central goal of ecocriticism, one of the youngest, cutting-edge, revisionist literary movements with a profound advocacy function that has influenced teaching and scholarship in the humanities since the late twentieth century. (1)

#### The Four Waves of Ecocriticism

There has come a long road through ecocriticism. The diverging pathway from one to another has evoked a vast range of compelling metaphors such as "wave," "palimpsest." Buell believes that no definitive map can be drawn, while pattern lines are being used to differentiate the first" wave "from the older second wave. In his book *The Future of Environmental Criticism*(2005), Lawrence Buell explains the first two waves of criticism. Slovic draws on Buell's "wave" metaphor to describe changes in the area and applies it to the third and fourth waves.

#### The functions of Ecocritics:

Ecocritics look differently at the natural environment. They shift vital focus from the inside to the outside. They deny the assumption that all is built socially or linguistically. They think that existence still remains inside humanity; however, it is with humanity and influences us. To interpret nature in literature, they introduce development and capacity, longevity and unsustainability, equilibrium, and imbalance.

Ecocritics play an important role in developing the eco-consciousness of readers in

order to address the global environmental crisis. They read essential texts for this purpose; they look differently at the natural world. They move our critical thinking from an internal to an external consciousness; deny the assumption that everything is socio- or linguistically structured: they claim that Existence does not exist in itself but is with and influences us. In order to interpret existence in the literary context, they add development and strength, sustainability, equilibrium, and imbalance.

Cheryll Glotflety makes it very clear in the first chapter of her book *The Ecocriticism Reader*(1996):

Ecocritics and theorists ask questions like the following: How is nature represented in this sonnet? 'What role does the physical setting play in the plot of this novel? Are the values expressed in this play consistent with ecological wisdom? How do our metaphors of the land influence the way we treat it? How can we characterize nature writing as a genre? In addition to race, class, and gender, should place become a new critical category? Do men write about nature differently than women do? In what ways has literacy itself affected humankind's relationship to the natural world? How has the concept of wilderness changed over time? In what ways and to what effect is the environmental crisis seeping into contemporary literature and popular culture? What view of nature informs U.S. Government reports, corporate advertising, and televised nature documentaries, and to what rhetorical effect? What bearing might the science of ecology have on literary studies? How is science itself open to literary analysis? What cross-fertilization is possible between literary studies and environmental discourse in related disciplines such as history, philosophy, psychology, art history, and ethics? (XIX)

### Shades of Ecology

There are two shades of ecology: shallow and deep. Shallow ecology is fundamentally

anthropocentric, which claims that all of nature's aims are to serve the human race and human beings are the masters of nature. It also calls for strategic use of natural resources for a brighter future of natural resources such as coal, gas, forestry, water, etc. Yet deep ecology questions this method of maintaining it in order to preserve things like it was without man intervening because it has a right to exist.

Deep ecology's central idea is described by Pramod K. Nayar in his book *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory*(2016)"Our world view, thinking, responses and action are human-centric (technically called anthropocentrism), but in order to ensure a safer planet we need to become eco- or biocentric." (335)

There are fundamental ideals for all life on this planet, and none is the boss of another. The growing organism that preserves an eco-system harmony shall have fair rights. Environmental criticism stresses this eco-consciousness by removing man's ego-consciousness. It hits against the arrogance of human dominance overall natural things. Everything is linked to everything in the environment. Nothing is better or smaller than something else. The emerging disasters in the world are a bi-product of human nature. This is not because of the nature of the environment, but because of the dynamics of our legislative framework. This understanding among men is built up through ecocriticism. Deep ecological understanding will be developed for nature protection in spite of the ongoing environmental problems in the world. Thus, ecocriticism has evolved rapidly as a literary theory throughout its short existence.

The word "deep ecology" coined by Arne Naess claims that independent of its devices; the natural environment is a delicate blend of complicated yet harmonic interconnections between all creatures. The main points of this theory have been proposed by Arne Naess. His key thoughts are as given below:

Deep Ecology asserts that both life forms and natural elements are intertwined. It argues that anthropocentrism has isolated and driven people to misuse their natural world. Deep Ecology does not

only provide an appreciation for all types of life, but also ecosystems such as mountains and rivers.

This ensures organic harmony. By damaging the natural world, human beings endanger not just themselves but also certain ecologically healthy species. The men on earth are no stronger than other species. Deep ecology thus encourages a sense of solidarity for the non-human components.

The understanding of deep climate is one of the most significant facets of eco-literature. The fundamental dignity of all entities irrespective of their functional gain to humanity is supported by this environmental ideology. The environmental theory believes that a dynamic interrelation occurs in nature between species to preserve a certain harmony within an environment. Human interference, which affects the natural environment between human beings and nonhumans, is fundamental to this interaction. The basic theory of deep ecology suggests that the world as a whole should be deemed to have such natural protection privileges. Each entity should be valued since it is related to the other. It is named 'simple,' since it maintains a strong view of the underlying truth of the connection of humans to the natural environment. In relation to its present definitions as a biological division, it often enters a broader metaphysical interpretation of ecology. The famous ecological campaign is against anthropocentrism, which offers a human incentive to use the ecosystem only for human benefit. Deep ecology is focused on certain conceptual beliefs that humans are not separated from the ecosystem and follow a more comprehensive attitude to the earth. It is the environment component. The deep knowledge of the world offers the green campaign a base. It encourages ecological ideals such as protection of the wilderness, population reduction, and a safe atmosphere for easy living. The ecologist also believes that our planet Earth is not an asset that can be used easily by humans. This is a resource. Any organism's existence depends on its overall well-being.

In conclusion, this research paper has provided a comprehensive examination of ecocriticism from a theoretical perspective,

shedding light on its evolution, key concepts, and implications for the study of environmental literature and discourse. We have traced the historical development of ecocriticism, emphasizing its transformation from a nascent field into a vibrant and influential discipline. Through the contributions of pioneering scholars and theorists, ecocriticism has emerged as a dynamic framework for analyzing the intricate interplay between human culture and the natural world.

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