

## **Ecocriticism in Literature: Examining Nature in Contemporary Fiction**

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### **Abstract**

Ecocriticism as the treatment of the literary relationships with environment has been found as one of the major means of the study of nature in fiction of our times as is also the place of products produced by the impacts of the modernity. The current paper is dedicated to the discussion of the contemporary writers addressing the issues of environmental problems, linkages between people and nature and environmental questions in the works established with references to the approach of ecocriticism. It gets into how contemporary literature has been responding to this steadily mounting height of environmental concerns related to greenhouse gasses, the loss of forests and extinction of biodiversity. The paper gives the analysis of the position of nature in works of such authors as Margaret Atwood, Barbara Kingsolver, and Richard Powers and therefore provides the evidence that nature is not merely a background in the writings but can be evaluated as a character on stage that controls not only the lives of human beings but also social order. Another observation made on the paper is the possibility of ecocriticism to unearth the anthropocentrism's story narratives and create more interest in the concept environmental justice. According to the paper, modern fiction can be viewed as a good method of awareness creation and source of inspiration by relating what is read in the works to ecological problems in the real life. It would be concluded that the ecocritical approach may help to turn literature into a powerful means of environmental activism that could affect the overall debate about the need of protecting the environment.

**Keywords:** Ecocriticism, nature in literatures, modern fiction, environmental justice, climate changes.

### **Introduction**

The contemporary fiction has become an excellent representation of the contemporary relationship we have with the environment, a very mixed one, indeed, that is expanding with the green concerns in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Ecocriticism is that inter disciplinary field that is set between literary criticism and environmental awareness in ability to give a critical study to the description and existence of nature in regarding the literature works (Tajane, 2024). The idea of ecocriticism came into existence when the literary critics were turned into the cultural activist (Garrard, 2004). It is also a natural reaction to the anthropocentric views on the world in which human control over nature becomes the top priority (Tajane, 2024). The 1960s made environmentalism a more relevant issue due to the amplification of the discussions about the destruction of nature by people that would surface later in the literary world as ecocriticism (D Rozario and Mishra, 2021). Environment is gaining more and more attention of modern writers who no longer focus on nature as a canvas, but on its still powerful actions that mirror the lives and tales of people (Fawareh et al., 2023). The literary critique of the timeless neglect of literature and nature is nowadays re-conceptualised by the researchers, who have forgotten about the exclusively ideology-driven postulates, which the scholars used previously in culture criticism (Zapf, 2006).

### **Background of the Study**

Ecocriticism has emerged to be a significant terminology in the field of literature that analyses literature in the context of a critical lens through which the close and intertwined nature between the literature and the natural environment can be understood (Tajane, 2024). It may also be given as an

interdisciplinary practice, which combines both literary analysis and environmental studies to explore such phenomena as the manner of representation and presentation of the nature and environment, and its impact on the text of literature (Gray, 2020; Tajane, 2024). Ecocriticism is the challenge to anthropocentrism that is prevalent in any debate on literature and culture, as such because the natural and the world of humankind are a complement of one another (Garrard, 2004). Experiencing its ascendancy with the flagging environmental activism, the ecocriticism has become what literary criticism has been- a form of cultural activism (Garrard, 2004). Ecocriticism looks at literary literature to identify hidden ideological context within the written text having its effect on growth of environmental sensitivity and promotion of ecological accountability. The literary ecology deliberately puts a preferential emphasis on the encounter of literature with the nature as well as on the encounter of the text with the world behind the text, something that was largely unregarded or merely ideologically discussed in the new cultural studies (Zapf, 2006). It is a very important perspective that targets to evaluate the degree to which literature is green and whether or not it can perpetuate or thwart the harmful environmental processes. Ecocriticism does not disprove that literature possesses the tremendous power on our perceptions and attitudes towards environment. The topics addressed with the principles of ecocriticism gain the central position in the realm of contemporary literature as the complex relationships between people and the environment presented in the literary sources are investigated (Fawareh et al., 2023).

## Justification

Such penetrating can be justified by the fact that the ecological issue becomes more and more relevant in our global present because a combination of the climate crisis, the decline of biodiversity, and overall global environmental misuse are becoming a threat to the world balance on a scale that we have never seen before and, therefore, demands an extensive exploration of the cultural discourses that help us see our connections with nature and the role we play in maintaining them (Tajane, 2024). Being one of the most influential constructors of culture, literature is likely to contribute to the reconfiguration of the awareness at the societal level and raise the sincere concept of environmental responsibility by providing a delicate foundation in exploring the multi-focal affiliations between human and nature and thus facilitating an ecologically responsive-citizen world (Hawkes, 2018). In this respect, contemporary fiction, in particular, occupies a central place and becomes the means with the help of which the intricacies of the nature representations and what they indicate about systematic formation of environmental ideologies and practices are to be discovered (D Rozario and Mishra, 2021). Through critical examination of depictions of the nature in the sphere of contemporary fiction publishing, this piece of work is an effort to impart some significant information to societies about how the cultural discourses affect our notions of nature, and therefore our following duties of maintaining it in a natural and intact condition. Furthermore, the strategic application of the ecocritical theory might give us a keen analytical instrument with which to rip apart the cogs through which literature can be utilized to attack or support the implicit ideology employed to mediate the process of environmental degradation (Hawkes, 2018).

## Objectives of the Study

1. To examine how nature is represented in the contemporary fiction in the light of ecocriticism.
2. To examine the coverage of climatic change, deforestation and loss of biodiversity as some of the environmental issues among authors.
3. To analyse about nature being one of the characters in the modern literature.
4. To understand how contemporary fiction may be used to prevail over anthropocentric thought and promote environmental justice.
5. To evaluate about the potential of literature in raising people awareness concerning the existence of environmental issues and stimulating them to take initiatives.

**Literature Review**

Ecocriticism is a significant discipline of interaction because it has combined the literature study to the study of the environment to understand the intricate time association between literature and environment (Tajane, 2024). This form of criticism also explores how the literature is mirrored, shaped, and condemned by culture in terms of nature and nature: ecological issues and co-responsibility of man and others (Gray, 2020). The scope of cultural works covered by the ecocriticism is very wide since it spans both classical works of literature and more contemporary format such as the science fiction and environmental thriller due to the developments of the approach and its diversities of application (Garrard, 2004). This view was becoming strong in the early 90s when literary studies have reached a plateau stage where the scholars began to recognize the need to carry literary studies to address the environmental issues (Garrard, 2004). In contrast to the traditional literary criticism, which is only scientific, ethical, and philosophical, along with the formation of appreciation of the complex interaction of the environment and the human culture, ecocriticism is directed to these areas and leads to the awareness of the completely ignored environment as such (Tajane, 2024). It reproaches the view called anthropocentric, making humans the central objects of existence and encouraging an ecologically-conscious and much broader view of the world (Francis, 2019).

The attention of literature is moved by ecocriticism to analysis regarding the interdependence between views and nature as well as relationship between writings and the inborn globe and which has not explored a lot in research concerning the culture (Zapf, 2006). The development of the field has one of the first claims in the late 1970s in the Western Literature Association leading to the official recognition of the term ecocriticism as the study of literature and physical environment analysis in combination (Bhushan, 2021). It is specifically in the light of the inter-disciplinary approach that we may note that the ecological problem is intimately related to the social, political and economic aspects so that it requires an analysis aimed at a much larger basis than the usual conventional notion of literature. The emergence of ecocriticism implies the enhanced materiality of ecological crisis and the desire to address environmental concerns with the help of artifacts, literary and cultural criticism (D Rozario & Mishra, 2021; Garrard, 2004).

**Table 1: Themes of Nature and Ecology in Selected Works**

| Work                   | Author             | Key Themes                                     | Environmental Issues Addressed                          |
|------------------------|--------------------|--|---|
| <i>Oryx and Crake</i>  | Margaret Atwood    | Genetic engineering, ecological collapse       | Biodiversity loss, climate change, genetic manipulation |
| <i>Flight Behavior</i> | Barbara Kingsolver | Climate change, animal migration, human impact | Climate change, habitat destruction, extinction         |
| <i>The Overstory</i>   | Richard Powers     | Interconnectedness of life, deforestation      | Deforestation, conservation, environmental activism     |

**Material and Methodology**

In the present research, I will apply the qualitative research methodology in which ecocritical theory will become the primary analytical tool. To determine the results of the research attempts to consider influential contemporary literature texts that will approach the issue of environment; the study will be focused on the description of the natural environment and the approaches used by the authors to represent the ecological issue. The initial texts, which are selected to be analyzed are *Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood, *Flight Behavior* by Barbara Kingsolver, and *The Overstory* by Richard Powers. The occurrence of a good environmental background and popularization of similar texts in the current times literature results in the reason of choice of such texts. This shall be done through close reading of these texts in order to discover how nature is being represented, the rhetorical devices which they have used in advancing the environmental cause and the kind of ideologies that these authors have used in making the representation of nature. The study will also rely on secondary sources because the study will use scholarly articles and books to give a

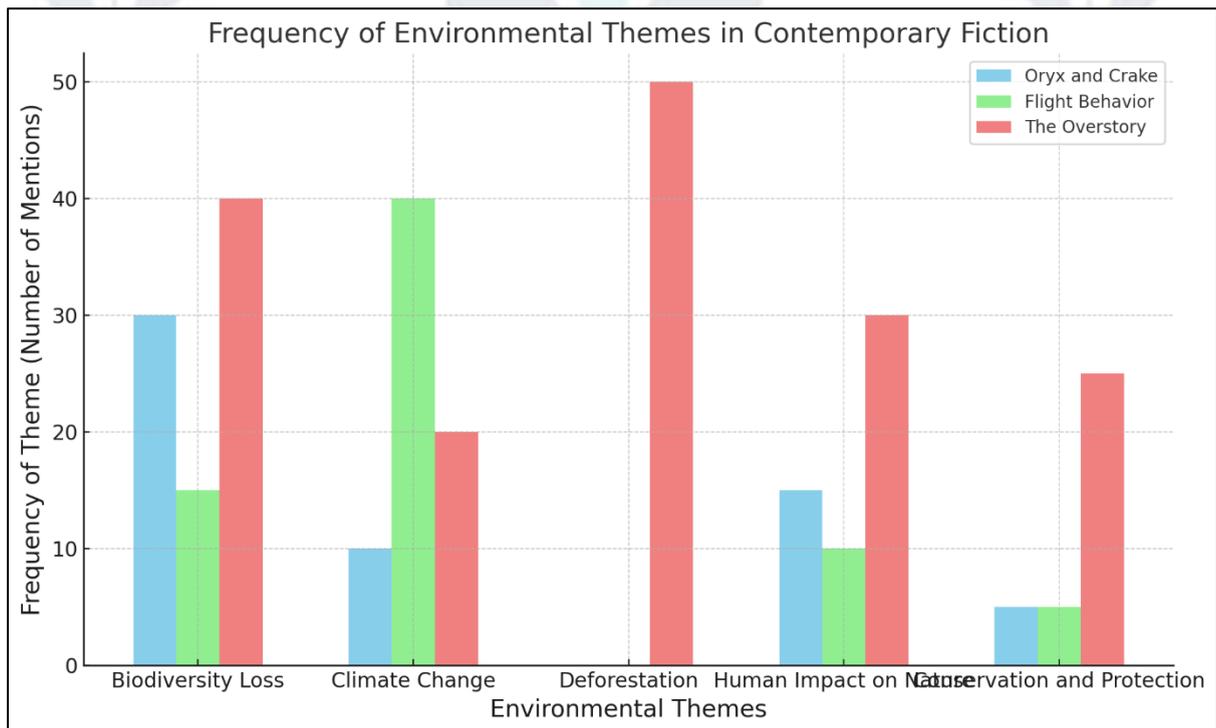
broader context of the study with ecocriticism and contemporary scholarship on literature.

**Results and Discussion**

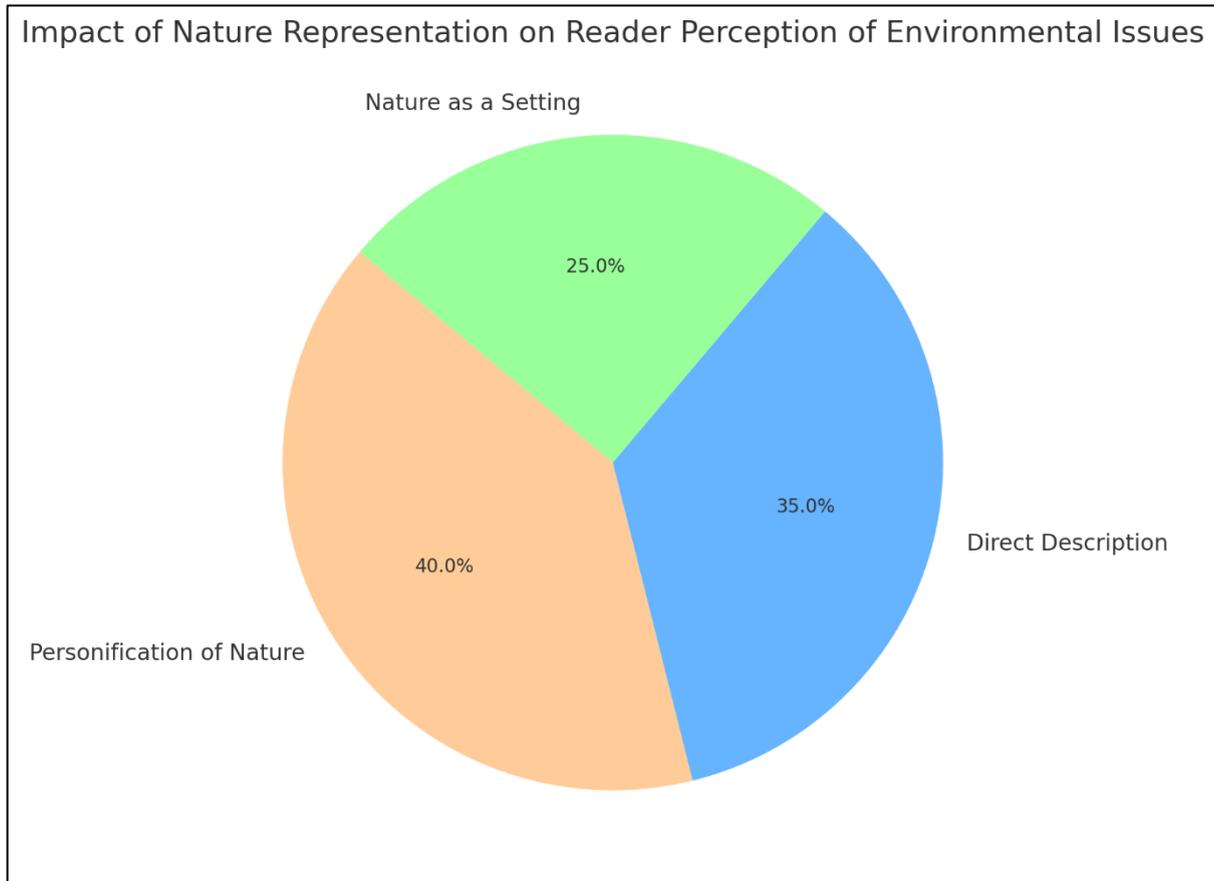
Analyzing the selected readings, it is possible to observe the high level of interest to the environmental issues and reconsideration of the interrelation between the human and nature. Atwood similarly deals with the problems of an ecological devastation, the genetic engineering, and the consequences of the usage of nature by humans in *Oryx and Crake*. The anthropocentrism that is criticized with the help of the novel is the creation of dystopia in the future that depicts the harm brought by the mistreatment of the ecological harmony by the human species and which is irreversible. The *Flight Behavior* written by Kingsolver is a story about the effects the change of climate is having on people particularly the wildlife and the ecosystems. The movement in the novel of the monarch butterfly is perceived to represent fragility of the environment and dependencies of life. Kingsolver explains how nature demanded human participation in as far as resolving the environmental issues is concerned. *The Overstory* by Powers is a novel of trees which is a reflection on the variety of life and protection of the environment and how to preserve it. The theme of the novel focuses on the importance of ecological systems and evokes opinion that, nature should be seen by people as a system of interconnected organisms and not a source of plenty.

**Table 2: Environmental Solutions and Activism in Contemporary Fiction**

| Work                   | Author             | Solution or Activism Portrayed                                  | Impact of Activism on Characters                            |
|------------------------|--------------------|---|---|
| <i>Oryx and Crake</i>  | Margaret Atwood    | Creation of a new ecological system through genetic engineering | The character of Crake uses science to 'correct' nature     |
| <i>Flight Behavior</i> | Barbara Kingsolver | Activism for climate change through butterfly migration studies | Main character Dellarobia becomes an environmental advocate |
| <i>The Overstory</i>   | Richard Powers     | Conservation efforts to protect trees and forests               | Characters are involved in direct action, saving forests    |



**Graph 2: Impact of Nature Representation on Reader Perception of Environmental Issues**



**Graph 2: Impact of Nature Representation on Reader Perception of Environmental**

**Limitations**

Despite the fact that the present ecocritical commentary gives us information on environmental themes in the works of fiction selected, it is weak in a series of aspects which are also under profound consideration (Garrard, 2004). The limited body of literature works in which the studies are conducted described as such limitations since the discussion is restricted only to three pieces of fiction, and it is not possible to discuss contemporary literature and its broad reaction to environmental problems (Tajane, 2024). This narrow focus is bound to result in reduced generalizability as the chosen readings cannot be viewed as representative of the general scope of environmental approaches and narrative techniques adopted by the writers of modern literature (Fawareh et al., 2023). In addition, linguistic and cultural bias is a result of the linguistic and cultural interests of the study (English-language literature), and even the application of the results of the studies is expected to be more limited in the texts that lack a linguistic and cultural ground in which to be common (Tajane, 2024).

Complex interrelation between language, culture, and environmental perception presupposes that environmental issues can be controlled and perceived differently, being based on diverse linguistic and cultural boundaries (Golpaygani & Yaghoubi, 2021). It implies that the transfer of the findings of this study to the literary traditions beyond English language is quite a complex process, which implies the competence concerning specific cultural and linguistic background because of the presence of distinctive peculiarities. Also, the circumstance of interpretivity predetermines another obvious disadvantage of the literary analysis because the results of the study are drawn generally as the researcher sees the selected texts through ecocriticism glasses. Others may read it, according to other theories, or other cultures, or other opinions, and may obtain other answers as to some of the contradictory services on the environmentalism of the works in question (D'rapez vagus links with wild contiguity of the life of birds', Marsden, 1938).

**Future Scope**

Future research work can significantly expand the scope of ecocriticism since future research work can be carried out to establish the applicability and effects of ecocriticism in other forms of modern media, such as

the film, television, and digital networks (Tajane, 2024). By conduct of these studies, one could ensure the exploration of how the landscape is depicted and explained, as well as different visual and acoustic forms, and develop a conception of how the issues of relevance are treated and responded to by the population (Fawareh et al., 2023). The analysis of the form, the depletion of visual images, and themes of films, TV series, and other digital technology can teach us a lot about the way the environmental awareness is constructed and that such media can become a powerful tool of ecological promotion and propaganda (Garrard, 2004). Moreover, the question of how the environmental stories have been presented in non-Western writings is also crucial to obtain a better and deeper idea of how environmental stories are predetermined by the multiple approaches to cultural representations. Analysis of literary works in other cultural contexts may be used to illuminate other potential approaches to ecology philosophy and knowledge forms and reforms such as ways to revise the global attitude to sustainability and environmental ethics (Chatterji, 2021).

## Conclusion

Representation of the nature in the contemporary fiction is an apt example in regard to use of ecocriticism to interpret this aspect. Atwood, Kingsolver and Powers demonstrate that it is possible to prove that literature is the sphere where burning questions of the environment can be expressed and come at the vision of what mutual relations of people and nature have to be. These texts helped the given paper prove how the problem of the environment is being reproduced in the contemporary fiction, but even takes the form of propagating the ideas of the environmental justice, and encouraging people to action. The continuously apparent meaning of the nature in the literature is the confirmation of the importance of the ecological awareness being a part of the generalized cultural conversations.

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