



Tracing the Emergence and Growth of Ecocritical Language

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ABSTRACT

During the last few decades, the disturbance in the environmental conditions has given rise to a great threat to Earth and the organisms residing in it. Under these circumstances, a new theory of reading texts came into existence known as Ecocriticism. Ecocriticism is a literary theory which shows the interconnectedness between the human and the non-human agency, but it has not yet achieved that attention which other theories have. In this context, ecocritics strive to influence readers and writers by introducing and developing a specific vocabulary in their works. This paper can assist readers in understanding how ecocritics have developed a vocabulary of their own. This paper aims to find and trace the emergence of ecological linguistics and its growth. Also, the aim is to perform an up-to-date assessment of its current state. Since Ecolinguistics work upon the role language plays in the life-sustaining interactions of humans and their physical environment, the main aim is to explore this language as used by ecocritics in order to reach the eco-critical judgements about certain texts—both the provisional and the temporal judgements. The language has a soft, respectful and rigorous influence on the environment, so in this perspective, ecocritics establish tools in order to determine the influence of narrative techniques and the structures on readers. Readers and writers encounter varied narrative styles when discussing environment and ecology, this paper will show how the attempt to create a specific vocabulary in this regard will better solidify the foundations of this field.

KEYWORDS

Ecolinguistics, Ecocriticism, Vocabulary, Anthropocentrism, Rhetoric, Language, diversity.

INTRODUCTION

Nature and literature have always been in a close relationship and this study of the relationship between nature and literature is called ecocriticism. Glottfelty and Fromm (1996) has used the word ecocriticism in their recently published anthology entitled *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. This book contains many essays on the ecological approach to literary studies, which lead to the emergence of a new type of literary criticism known to be as ecocriticism.

Main objectives of Ecocriticism are:

- To explore the ways in which we imagine and portray the relationship between humans and environment.
- To try to find the common ground between the humans and environment in order to show how these can coexist in various ways.
- To offer an “analysis of the cultural constructions of nature, which also includes an analysis of language, knowledge, desire, and power” (Legler 1997. p. 227).

Simply ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment it inhabits. The word ecocriticism is a collective term for diverse movement but has not yet achieved the standing accorded to other studies. The environmental turn in literary studies emerged as a self-conscious movement just a decade or so ago. Eventually, it will find its path through obstacles, and for this purpose ecocritics are looking for various solutions. The fundamental task of ecocritics is to treat the texts from the viewpoint of environmental concern which has given rise to a different field of study that is ecocritical linguistics. Ecocritics hope to engage readers and writers by introducing different critical practices so as to allow works about environmental values to gain popularity and initiate change. But ecocritical criteria is being pulled in different directions reflecting the contradictory demands made by the environmental crisis itself. The ecocritic’s task is to assess these conflicting pressures and attempt to work through the tension they come into contact in this direction.

There are many environmental dangers importunately on the rise. For instance, Global warming, the threat to biodiversity etc. In September 2009, the Hadley Centre at the United Kingdom’s Meteorological Office reported that a global increase of 4°C by the end of the century is likely. Such increasing dangers require rapid action. In the face of warnings like these, many ecocritics feel that their work has an atavistic demand. They are searching for the ways of getting people to understand and care consequently. They hope that their arguments will persuade people out of their apathy and will influence new creative works. For ecocriticism,

there is an exceptional sense of urgency created by these increasing warnings. Definition of ecocriticism start by linking the literary movement to global crisis. This holds the implication that the fundamental purpose of ecocriticism is to change culture, and through culture change policy and behaviour.

As an insightful and academic practice, ecocriticism implies investigating, reading, discussing and writing about language as an on-going result of development. Language isn't inalienably isolated from the common world, as certain speculations may propose, however is developing out of similar transformative cycles as the earth itself. The concerns that whether language represents the world, or whether it separates us from the world, distracts us from the very important duties we need to perform.

Glenn A. Love, one of the first ecocritics, said in 1990 that “The most important function of literature today is to redirect human consciousness to a full consideration of its place in a threatened natural world[...] Because of a widely shared sense—outside the literary establishment—that the current ideology which separates human beings from their environment is demonstrably and dangerously reductionist” (Glotfelty and Fromm, 1996, p. 237). Lawrence Buell (2005) rejects the notion that the humanities are impractical and sees ecocriticism as having been conceived from the beginning as an “alliance of academic critics, artists, environmental educators, and green activists” (p. 6). Every ecocritic speaks from a different ecocritical position, but their mission is to reach out to the academic audiences and by their activism contribute in the transformation of behaviour in response to the urgent environmental crisis. In this context they strive hard to influence readers and writers by introducing and developing a specific vocabulary in their critical works.

With the passage of time, there was a rapid growth in progress and development of human race which has been active in playing a role the progress and development of language (Suleman, Mohamed, 2019; Suleman, Mohamed & Ahmmed, 2020). With continued development in every field of study, languages have to develop at an equal speed, adapting and growing to keep up with the expressions the understanding of these studies require. Leading to the creation of specialized vocabularies which would allow readers to understand said advancements better. Over the years the inventions in science have led to the invention of words since the need for a common vocabulary which can help communication has cropped up.

Lawrence Buell (2005) in his work “The Future of Environmental Criticism” has introduced a new vocabulary of and for Ecocriticism which is an attempt to create a specific manner

of writing about the relationship between nature and mankind, and hence, can solidify the foundations of this field. By the end of the twentieth century environmentalists have used a range of artistic forms and stylistics in their works to highlight certain aspects of the nature-human relationship. The examples are bioregionalism, brownfield, cyborg, reflexive modernisation, biopolitics, pastoral outrage, postmodern pastoral, consumerist passivity etc. Let us discuss some of these terms coined by him.

In the opening chapter, the writer uses the word “Technodominationism” which is defined as “God’s mandate to man to take dominion over the creatures of sea and earth and subdue them.” Here the author says that the opening chapters of Genesis have held the blame for being the root cause behind technodominationism (Buell, 2005, p. 2). The writer argues that “the idea of nature” has been a dominant or a least residual concern for literary scholars and intellectual historians ever since these fields came into being. Since ecocriticism is consistently dealing with this aspect of man’s dominion over nature or vice versa, the coining of this term is monumental. It has crystallised a dispersed thought into a single linguistic term.

Cyborg is a mid-twentieth-century coinage, deriving from cybernetics denoting an organic typically human being altered by mechanical means. Since the mid-1980s the idea has been given greater circulation and bite through influence of Haraway (1991), in which cyborg signifies not one but three crucial boundary breakdowns: between organisms and machines, between humans and nonhumans, and between the physical and nonphysical.

The word proto ecology has been mentioned in ecocritical works, in context of William Wordsworth’s creations. The central argument being that the works written during the Romantic Age should not be treated as writings meant simply to express love for nature but instead should be seen to emphasize proto-ecological knowledge and environmentalist commitment. By proto ecology the author means the primitive or original source of information about nature or ecology.

The other word used by the author in his work “The Future of Environmental Criticism” is “brownfield”. This term was coined by environmental analysts in the early 1990s to denote toxic sites, the opposite of affluent suburban and exurban “greenfields”, particularly in inner-city areas, that pose health hazards and require remediation (Shutkin and Mores 2000, pp. 57-75). In urban and industrial zones, the brownfield is used to characterise the degraded landscapes. The maldistribution of Brownfield sites in poor and minority neighborhoods, and the threat of further degradation, has been key to galvanizing the environmental justice movement.

As ecocriticism has taken an increasing interest in urban environments, brownfields as well as green fields have become more important to its agenda as well (Lawrence Buell, 1994).

“Deep Ecology” is a word used and introduced by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess to distinguish Naess’s biotically egalitarian vision of “organisms as knots in the biospherical net or field of intrinsic relations” from shallow environmentalist campaigns against “pollution and resource depletion” chiefly for “the health and affluence of people in the developed countries” (Naess, 1973, p. 95). Deep ecology can be differentiated from ecosophy as a personalised version of the former. Deep ecology contemplates an understanding of selfhood “based on active identification with wider and wider circles of being” (Mathews, 2001, p. 221).

From the standpoint that theory and ecology might be seen as a fruitful, energizing collaboration to the end the calling into question “the concepts on which the old hierarchies are built, even as one resists an exclusive focus on textuality as networks of signifying systems of all kinds that would privilege networks of language and culture to the eclipse of culture’s implication in the networks of the land” (Campbell, 1989, pp. 128-136). Altogether the literary theory’s relation to ecology is a quest for adequate models of inquiry and gives rise to the various other theories which in collaboration with ecocriticism have presented themselves as enhancements to literary theory’s preexisting toolkit. In this direction literary ecotheory has been evolving and giving rise to various Bioregionalism is a self-conscious movement which began in the America west. According to the two California environmentalists who put the term in circulation, it “refers both to geographical terrain and a terrain of consciousness.” A bioregion is determined “initially” by “climatology, physiography, animal and plant geography,” etc., typically including a major watershed”; but its boundaries and resonance are confirmed over time by inhabitation of those who have made a long commitment to be there (Berg and Dasmann, 1977, pp. 399-400). So, bioregionalism is neither a species of environmental determinism nor of cultural constructionism, but an attempt to integrate ecological and cultural affiliations within the framework of place-based sensibility” (Thomashow, 1999, p. 121). Bioregionalism tries to regard and reestablish common frameworks while fulfilling fundamental human requirements in manageable manners, it believes that the geological units of little scope are likely to advance such commitment.

Lawrence Buell’s work provides a very useful glossary of ecocritical words like anthropocentrism, biocentrism and ecocentrism. Anthropocentrism is the hypothesis and vision that

the interests of humans are of more concern than those of nonhumans. Anthropocentrism actually covers a large number of possible positions, from the positive conviction that human interests should succeed, and the belief that zero-degree anthropocentrism is not desirable. Anthropocentrism is defined as a significant idea in the field of environmental ethics and ecological way of thinking, where it is regularly viewed as the underlying cause of issues made by human activity inside the ecosphere.

According to Buell (2005):

Biocentrism is defined that all organisms, including humans, are part of a larger biotic web or network or community whose interests must constrain or direct the human interest. Used as a semi-synonym for ecocentrism and in antithesis to anthropocentrism. But even most self-identified biocentrists or ecocentrists recognise these ethical paradigms as ideals toward which we strive, rather than actualities likely to be implemented in practice (p. 136).

The other word which Buell has mentioned in his vocabulary of Ecocriticism is Ecocentrism. Ecocentrism as per Buell (2005) “is the view in environmental ethics that the interest of the ecosphere must override that of the interest of individual species” (p. 137). It is mentioned that the specific world of organisms is known as biocentrism while as ecocentrism is the interlink between organisms and inanimate objects.

In general, ecocentrists hold that “the world is an intrinsically dynamic, interconnected web of relations with no absolute dividing lines between the living and the nonliving, the animate and the inanimate” (Leopold, 1949, p. 204). Also, Ecosophy or ecophilosophy is defined as a philosophy of ecological harmony or equilibrium. The term was coined by Arne Naess, the father of “deep ecology”. Guattari Naess defined ecosophy in the following way:

By an ecosophy I mean a philosophy of ecological harmony or equilibrium. A philosophy as a kind of sofia (or) wisdom, is openly normative, it contains both norms, rules, postulates, value priority announcements and hypotheses concerning the state of affairs in our universe. Wisdom is policy wisdom, prescription, not only scientific description and prediction. The details of an ecosophy will show many variations due to significant differences concerning not only the 'facts' of pollution, resources, population, etc. but also value priorities (Drengson & Inoue, 1995, p. 8).

CONCLUSION

The earth is facing a crisis these days, because of the human and non-human imbalance. Global warming, environmental degradation, biodiversity loss and ecological crisis has put a very negative impact on the nature. In order to overcome these dangers which our environment is facing,

there is a requirement of better understanding. Ecocritics play a very huge role in making the people understand the problems which we are facing today. Also, readers and writers encounter varied narrative styles when discussing environment and ecology, and in this regard ecolinguistics work upon the role the language plays in ecocriticism. Ecocriticism is inherently interdisciplinary and this attempt by ecocritics to develop a vocabulary of their own can gain popularity and legitimacy for this field. The two ways of introducing and developing have given context to many words which they were lacking before. This contextualising and layering of language has allowed the communication, growth and propagation of the ecocritical method more convenient and efficient. Repeated use of this said vocabulary has allowed the setting up of an ecolinguistic system wherein discourse on the subject can move beyond the basic concepts saturated in those words.

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