Ecocritical Prospective in Poetry

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Abstract: Ecocriticism has been a significant field of study since the last decade of the twentieth century. The chief focus of ecocriticism is the relationship man shares with nature. With the increasing crisis in ecology, it becomes important to study human-nature relationships more closely. It is known to all that the nineteenth century English romantic poets gave utmost importance on nature and have explored various shades of nature in their poetry. Among the nineteenth century romantics, William Wordsworth has explored nature in a more interesting way and has considered it as a separate entity. This paper is an attempt to study a few selected poems of William Wordsworth from an ecocritical perspective. A green literary text or an eco-poem is the wisdom of understanding human through nature. Green discourse is the need of the hour. Environmental chaos has given birth to the reinvention of glorified nature. Its purpose is to bring human beings from their insensitiveness towards nature. As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse it negotiates between human and non-human. It aims to explore the environmental dimensions of literature. Although literature has dealt with environmental concerns since antiquity, it has never been has explored with such urgency as it is done today. The paper seeks to explore select poems in Indian English literature from an eco-critical perspective. Although there has been many poems in Indian English literature which deals explicitly with the nature, the attitude towards nature in those poems were that of pastoral impulse, an aesthetic appreciation of nature or a philosophical and mystical attitude towards nature. This paper makes an eco-critical analysis of select Indian English poems to give vent to eco terrorism and the general deterioration of the earth's environment.

[Bhupinder Kaur. **Ecocritical Prospective in Poetry.** *Researcher* 2026;18(11):14-17]. ISSN 1553-9865 (print); ISSN 2163-8950 (online). http://www.sciencepub.net/researcher. 03. doi:10.7537/marsrsj181126.03

Keywords: ecocriticism; ecology; romantic poetry; nature; human

Introduction: Ecocriticism is a field of literary study that addresses human relationship with nature. As an academic discipline, ecocriticism began in earnest in the 1990's, but its roots go back to the late 1970's. The term "ecocriticism" was coined in 1978 by William Rueckert in his essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism." Many critics have defined ecocriticism in different ways. Cheryll Glotfelty, one of the pioneers in the field, has defined ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment". On the other hand, David Mazel declares it is the analysis of literature "as though nature mattered." The study of ecocriticism, as it is argued, cannot be performed without a keen understanding of the environmental crisis of modern times and thus must inform personal and political actions. Therefore, ecocriticism is, in a sense, a form of activism. Many critics also emphasize the interdisciplinary nature of the enquiry, which is informed by ecological science, politics, ethics, women's studies, Native American studies, and history, among other academic fields.

Ecocriticism aims to investigate the global ecological crisis through the intersection of literature, culture, and the physical environment. Nature has always been the greatest source of inspiration for poetry from time immemorial. Starting with the ancient pastorals, the earliest poets used rural settings and vivid nature imagery to capture their surrounding world, thus presenting immense vistas and precise microcosms for the readers to enjoy, observe and reflect. However, the environmental crisis of the recent times have upended the natural world and the comfortable nature tropes of the past no longer seem

possible leading to the development of a new style of poetic expression that laments the loss of the natural world, while presenting a world plagued with environmental calamities. Ecocriticism provides an insight into environmental consciousness and a new perspective to the idea of nature. His poetry often advocates issues of animal subjectivity, endangered species, wildlife extinction and environmental ethics. An ecocritical reading of his poetry ignites a fresh outlook that focuses to refine the idea of nature and address questions of ecological interconnectedness and environmentalism. As a poet aware of his significant social responsibility, Hughes showed interests in issues and concerns linked to human-nature relationship, self-destructive spirit of human beings, life and death, animals, unconscious life, and conscious decisions. This paper attempts to explore Ted Hughes's poetry in relation to an emergent eco poetics and his ecological consciousness. Ted Hughes (1930-1998), Poet Laureate of England from 1984 until his death is one of the giants of 20th century British poetry. He was a prolific poet, translator, editor, and children's book author interested in extraordinary forms of knowledge, creative writing, environmental activism and national movements against agricultural and industrial contamination (Gifford 2009:1) [3] . His poetry often advocates issues of animal subjectivity, endangered species, wildlife extinction and environmental ethics. An ecocritical reading of his poetry ignites a fresh outlook that focuses to refine the idea of nature and address questions of ecological interconnectedness and environmentalism. As a poet aware of his significant social responsibility, Hughes showed interests in issues and concerns linked to human-nature relationship, self-destructive spirit of human beings, life and death, animals, unconscious life, and conscious decisions. He was a prominent public intellectual who cofounded the West Country Rivers Trust and supported organizations like the Torridge Action Group, the Countryside Commission and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. Scholars have researched Hughes's active engagement in environmental issues before, however the opening of the British Library's Ted Hughes archive in 2011, revealed a far greater breadth of material than had previously been accessible which transform our understanding of Hughes as an environmentalist and environmental writer by providing a far more detailed account of his activities. In 2010, Carol Ann Duffy inaugurated the Ted Hughes Award for New York in Poetry, the Ted Hughes Society was formed in 2011, and Jonathan Bate's major biography, Ted Hughes: The Unauthorized Life (2015) was inspired by Hughes's environmentalism (Roberts 2015). Since then, a new Ted Hughes Project has been founded at the University of Huddersfield, headed by South Yorkshire poet, scholar and hunter Steve Ely. His passion for nature arises as a result of his early years in the rural areas of Yorkshire and his enchantment with animals, and his poetry developed from his childhood experiences, interrelating animal life and atrocities of human kind. Analyzing Hughes's war-poetry, Meyers finds a connection between animals and soldiers that both kill their own kind with fierce primitivism (2013: 32). Environmental criticism, also known as eco criticism, ecopoetics and 'green' studies, is a rapidly emerging field of literary study that considers the relationship of literature and environment from an interdisciplinary point of view, so as to analyze the contemporary environmental crisis and find possible solutions. Ecocriticism was officially heralded by the publication of two seminal works in the 1990s: The Ecocriticism Reader edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm and The Environmental Imagination by Lawrence Buell. Ecocriticism investigates the relationship between human and the natural/non-human world in literature and deals with how environmental issues, cultural issues concerning the environment, and human attitude towards nature are presented and analyzed. Glotfelty describes eco criticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and physical environment" (1996: xviii) and as a discipline, eco criticism is established on the reciprocal connection between humanities and the natural world. The emergence of the theory is possibly derived from the characteristics of "the century of environment" that comprises literary-environmental interrelations; ecology and population based difficulties which inescapably and progressively advocates the necessity of including environmental considerations for any kind of literary criticism, handling social and physical

reality (Love 2003:1) [10] . While Rudd defines origins of the perspective as having "roots in the ethical and political concerns of ecology and environtalism" (2010:8), Serpil Oppermann explains that the aim of the theory is "to bring transformation of literary studies by linking literary criticism and theory with the ecological issues at large - the environmental issues related with both nature, landscape and urban as a result of destructive alterations on Earth which endangers not only human species but also all other living creatures" (1999:29-30). Literature has a crucial role in an enormously complicated global system in which thoughts, matter and energy interact, and eco criticism expands "the world" as a concept by actually including the whole ecosphere (Glotfelty & Fromm 1996: xix) [4] . The theory also functions as a response to environmental destruction, natural and man-made disasters, as it is necessary to grasp the link between human and the natural world. Historian Donald Worster observes that global crisis occurs as a result of the dysfunctional moral system of society rather than ecosystem and proposes that in order to overcome the crisis, human beings ought to realize their impact on nature and recognize those moral systems to restructure them accordingly. He further underlines that "historians, scholars, anthropologists and philosophers cannot reform but they can help with understanding" (1993:27). The idea that nature is meant for serving human need has often incited a selfish utilitarian attitude towards nature. However, after the 18th century several voices emerged seeking a revaluation of the relationship between man and environment, and man's view of nature. Arne Naess, a Norwegian philosopher, developed the notion of "Deep Ecology" which emphasizes the basic interconnectedness of all life forms and nature, and presents a symbiotic and holistic world-view rather than an anthropocentric one. The late 20th century saw a new threat in the form of ecological disaster as a result of nuclear war, depletion of natural resources, population explosion, exploitative technologies, pollution, and extinction of species etc. In such a context, literary and cultural theories has begun to address the issues as part of academic discourse. During the recent years, ecocriticism has gained a lot of attention owing to the higher social emphasis laid on environmental destruction, thereby, opening more avenues for analyzing and interpreting literary texts.

Growth and Development of Ecocriticism

Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm included Rueckert's essay in their edition *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology (1996)*. It has become an outstanding landmark in the emergence of the theory of ecocriticism. In 1985 Fredericko Waage edited *Teaching Environmental Literature: Materials, Methods, Resources.* In this anthology nineteen scholars have expressed their environmental concern and the awareness of ecology in literature. Harold Fromm organized MLA special session on *'Ecocriticism: The Greetings of Literary Studies'* in 1991. American Literature Association symposium entitled '*American Nature Writing: New Approaches'* is also notable. A new *Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE)* was founded in 1992 at the annual meeting of Western Literature Association. Its purpose is to encourage new nature writing, traditional and innovative intellectual approaches to environmental literature. In a span of twelve years from 1992, Ecocriticism has bloom almost magically. Lawrence Buell has contributed a lot to the emergence of ecocriticism. His work *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture (1996)* is an ecocritical approach to Henry David Thoreau. He wrote on environmental crisis in *Writing for an Endangered World (2003)*. Lawrence Buell discussed about the first wave of ecocriticism in his book entitled, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination (2005)*. The first wave of ecocriticism spotlighted the nature writing, ecocentric texts and natural history. The first wave led the way to the second wave of ecocriticism. He has identified these two phases of ecocriticism: the first wave of ecocriticism and the second wave of ecocriticism or revisionist ecocriticism. The first wave ecocritics have mainly focused on the literary forms of nature writing, nature poetry and wilderness fiction. The second wave ecocritics are disposed towards environmental justice issues. Their social ecocriticism takes

urban and degraded landscapes just as seriously as natural landscapes (Buell 22). Lawrence Buell finally admits the fact that the western academy has its focus on ecocriticism only as environmental criticism (Buell 28).

Ecocriticism has its major concern with writing on nature and ecological themes. The second wave moves from inherent environment to fabricated environment, from wilderness to urban landscape. It ultimately includes all space and also non-space. The environment really means everything that contains everything else and moreover anything.

CONCLUSION

Some literary critics do not associate Wordsworth's poetry with ecocriticism because they believe that his poetic intention was to transcend the social and natural world in order to understand and inspire the human imagination. However, Hartman states that Wordsworth saw nature as 'a presence and a power', not an object and that the poet's missionary zeal to protect the earth because the human imagination needs to coexist physically and intellectually with it. Wordsworth rejected the assumption that humans should dominate nature and in his poetry he artistically attempts to justify his own view. In this sense he is the most environmentally conscious poet of the Romantic age of English literature.

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