



AN ECO CRITICAL STUDY: SHORT STORIES OF FAULKNER, HAWTHORNE AND MUNROE

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Abstract: Ecological imbalance is prevalent everywhere. We can only preserve the environment by establishing harmony between man and nature. Nature is now powerless and helpless due to our materialistic, comfortable, and consumerist civilization. Environmental abuse has been an important issue in the present scenario. Our consumption habits have become so extreme that they are harming the environment for us. For our own consumption, we are indiscriminately harming natural resources. We have abused nature's gifts, to the point where they are now all in danger. Abundance is synonymous with nature but it is not for the greed and profit of man. Unbalanced by greed, nature assumes an angry form, and then everything is destroyed. The duty of explaining the status of the social situation and exposing the decadence and injustice of society falls to the author, who attempts to express reality objectively and impersonally. The writers embody a sense of ecological responsibility and agency, reflecting the potential of literature as a medium for promoting environmental awareness and activism. Thus, the worry and consciousness about the environment have been examined in this paper through an analytical study of the short stories, "The Bear" by William Faulkner, "The Birthmark" by Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Alice Munro's "Boys and Girls".

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Green reading, Eco-centric reading, Ecological imbalance, Nature, Human Responsibility, Environmental consciousness, American short story

Ecological imbalance is prevalent everywhere. We can only preserve the environment by establishing harmony between man and nature. Nature is now powerless and helpless due to our materialistic, comfortable, and consumerist civilization. Environmental abuse has been an important issue in the present scenario. Our consumption habits have become so extreme that they are harming the environment for us. For our own consumption, we are indiscriminately harming natural resources. We have abused nature's gifts, to the point where they are now all in danger. Abundance is synonymous with nature but it is not for the greed and profit of man. Unbalanced by greed, nature assumes an angry form, and then everything is destroyed.

The duty of explaining the status of the social situation and exposing the decadence and injustice of society falls to the author. The writers embody a sense of ecological responsibility and agency, reflecting the potential of literature as a medium for promoting environmental awareness and activism. Thus, the worry and consciousness about the environment have been examined in this paper through an analytical study of the short stories, "The Bear" by William Faulkner, "The Birthmark" by Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Alice Munro's "Boys and Girls".

In 1978, William Rueckert wrote an essay titled "*Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism*," in which the term "ecocriticism" was mentioned for the first time. Cheryll Glotfelty defines it as a, "...study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment.... ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies..." (Glotfelty, 1996). Studying how members of society behave and respond in

regard to nature and ecological issues is one of ecocriticism's key objectives. Over the years, the works of several authors, especially Donald Worchester's *Economic Systems: A History of Ecological Thought* (1977) and Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) brought into the limelight the environmental crisis and consciousness. Due to rising social emphasis on environmental degradation and advancements in technology, this type of critique has attracted a lot of attention lately. Thus, it expands the scope of literary and theoretical research by adopting an ecocritical approach to reading and understanding literary texts.

Ecocriticism, also known as environmental criticism, is a literary theory and interdisciplinary field of study that examines the relationship between literature and the environment, including how nature and ecological issues are represented in literary works. Ecocriticism explores the relationship between literature and the natural environment, and how human beings interact with and perceive nature. In the context of American short stories in English literature, eco-criticism can be seen as a lens through which to analyze how authors depict the natural world, human interactions with nature, and environmental concerns in their narratives.

Short stories have often reflected the evolving relationship between humans and the environment, as well as the impacts of industrialization, urbanization, and ecological degradation on society. Here are some key themes and aspects of eco-criticism in short stories:

Nature as a character: Many short stories personify nature, treating it as a character with its own agency, emotions, and voice. Authors often depict nature as an active participant in the narrative, capable of influencing the plot and shaping the lives of the characters. For example, in Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Birth-Mark" the natural world is personified through the character of Aylmer's laboratory, which symbolizes the power of science to manipulate and control nature.

Human-nature relationships: Eco-criticism in short stories often explore the complex relationships between humans and the natural world. This can include depictions of humans as being in harmony with nature, as being alienated from nature, or as exploiting and dominating nature for their own gain. For example, Faulkner's "The Bear" explores the relationship between humans and nature. "A Tiger in the House" by Ruskin Bond emphasizes that observance of the rules of a natural ecosystem by man will lead to a harmonious relationship with the fauna around us.

Environmental justice: Many literary works highlight environmental injustices, such as pollution, deforestation, and the displacement of indigenous peoples from their lands. Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Hungry Tides* and Mahashweta Devi's *Imaginary Maps* examine how authors critique or challenge societal norms and practices that harm the environment.

Ecological awareness and activism: Some short stories promote environmental awareness and activism by advocating for conservation, sustainability, and environmental protection. Authors may use their narratives to raise awareness about ecological issues, highlight the beauty and value of nature, and inspire readers to take action to protect the environment. For example, in Terry Tempest Williams', "The Clan of One-Breasted Women" the author reflects on the impact of nuclear testing on her family and the environment, advocating for environmental activism and social change. Mary Whitebird's "Ta-Na-E-Ka" and Hemingway's "An African Story" also explore ecological consciousness.

Nature as a source of inspiration and solace: Eco-criticism in short stories also explores the healing and restorative power of nature. Authors often depict nature as a source of inspiration, solace, and rejuvenation for the characters, who find solace and meaning in their connections with the natural world. For example, in Ernest Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River", the protagonist seeks solace and renewal in nature as he recovers from the trauma of war.

Pathetic fallacy: It is an important aspect of ecocriticism. It explores the depiction of human emotions through various elements and aspects of nature.

William Faulkner's "The Bear" is a complex and multi-layered story that lends itself well to ecocritical analysis. Nature plays a vital role in this story and its continuous association with the lead character develops the plot further. The story is set in the wilderness of the Mississippi Delta and follows the life of Isaac "Ike" McCaslin, a young boy who embarks on his first hunting trip with his father and other members of the hunting party. The trip takes place over several years, and over time, Ike becomes increasingly aware of the changing landscape and the impact of human activity on the natural world.

One of the key themes in "The Bear" is the relationship between humans and nature. The story portrays the wilderness as a place of both danger and beauty, and the characters are forced to confront their own mortality in the face of the natural world. The bear, in particular, is portrayed as a powerful and majestic creature, and the hunting of the bear becomes a symbol of the human desire to conquer and dominate the natural world.

At the same time, the story also suggests that our actions have a profound impact on the environment and that there is an inseparable and deep connection between humans and the natural world. The repeated references to the changing landscape and the destruction of the forests suggest that humans are slowly eroding the natural world and that our actions are having a lasting impact on the planet.

Another key theme in the story is the idea of tradition and inheritance. Ike's relationship with his grandfather, Carothers McCaslin, is central to the story, and his grandfather's beliefs about the natural world shape Ike's own understanding of the environment. The story suggests that we inherit our relationship with the natural world from our ancestors and that our actions are deeply rooted in the traditions and beliefs of our forebears.

Overall, "The Bear" is a powerful and evocative story and through its portrayal of the wilderness, the story reminds us of the power and beauty of the natural world and the impact that our actions can have on the environment.

Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story "The Birth-Mark" can be analyzed through an ecocritical lens, as it deals with the relationship between humans and nature. The story centers around the character of Aylmer, a scientist who becomes obsessed with removing a birthmark from his wife Georgiana's cheek, which he sees as a flaw in her perfection. Aylmer's attempt to remove the birthmark ultimately leads to Georgiana's death.

One way to approach the story from an ecocritical perspective is to examine the birthmark itself as a symbol of the natural world. The birthmark is described as a "crimson stain" on Georgiana's otherwise flawless complexion, and Aylmer sees it as a sign of imperfection. However, the birthmark is a part of her physical body that has been provided by nature so any attempt to remove it shall suggest separating oneself from nature itself. Further, Aylmer's efforts to try to change Georgiana's physical self could be deciphered as an attempt by human beings to alter the course of nature and prove their dominance over it.

He sees himself as a scientist with the power to perfect his wife, but in reality, he is attempting to defy the natural world and impose his own will on it. This is reflected in the language used to describe Aylmer's laboratory, which is filled with "chemicals and apparatus, of which the inexperienced man of letters, no less than the devoted artisan, might possess himself."

The story also explores the idea of the consequences of human actions on the natural world. Aylmer's attempt to remove the birthmark ultimately leads to Georgiana's death, which can be seen as a metaphor for the destructive consequences of human attempts to control and dominate nature. The ending of the story confirms this when the author writes, "But Georgiana had no sooner touched the flower than the whole plant suffered a blight, its leaves turning coal-black as if by the agency of fire."

In conclusion, Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Birth-Mark" can be analyzed through an ecocritical lens, as it deals with the relationship between humans and nature. The story explores the consequences of human attempts to control and dominate the natural world, and the idea that such attempts are ultimately destructive. The birthmark can be seen as a symbol of Georgiana's connection to the natural world, and Aylmer's attempt to remove it reflects his desire to dominate and control nature. It raises questions about ecological ethics and conservation. The short story portrays the Adi people's reverence for nature and their belief in the interconnectedness of all living beings. It also depicts the conflicts and challenges that arise when external forces disrupt the delicate balance between human beings and nature. The short story raises awareness about the need for sustainable practices, the preservation of indigenous ecological knowledge, and the conservation of natural resources.

Alice Munro's short story "The Boy and the Girl" can be viewed from an ecocentric perspective, emphasizing the relationship between people and their environment. Set on a farm in rural Ontario, the story follows a young woman on the verge of adulthood who struggles with her sexuality and her family's upbringing.

One of the main points of the story is the hero's relationship with farm animals. He is responsible for helping his father manage the wolf and mink farm and enjoys taking care of animals. However, as he grew older, he began to question the ethics of raising animals for their fur and eventually became dissatisfied with the practice. This illustrates the tension between human needs and desires and their impact on the natural world. Another important aspect of story is the contrast between the natural world and the social world of man.

The protagonist has a deep bond with the land and the animals around him, but he also feels influenced by his gender and the expectations of his family. This tension is reflected in her conflicted feelings about leaving the country and going to school, as she is torn between her love of the world and her desire to pursue education and other lives.

The story also addresses environmental issues such as the impact of business and industrialization on rural communities and the natural world. Although the world around him changes rapidly, the male hero refuses to change and decides to continue his normal life. This shows how people negatively affect the world by taking care of their own needs and expectations for the health and well-being of the environment.

Overall, “Boys and Girls” is a deep and touching story that illustrates the connection between humans and the natural world, and invites the reader to consider how society as we know it affects the environment.

The story also touches on broader environmental issues, such as the impact of industrialization and urbanization on rural communities and the natural world. The protagonist’s father is resistant to change and is determined to continue his traditional way of life, even as the world around him is changing rapidly. This highlights the ways in which human beings can have a negative impact on the natural world by prioritizing their own needs and desires over the health and well-being of the environment. Conclusively, “Boys and Girls” is a deep and intricate tale that draws attention to the complex connections between people and the natural world and invites readers to reflect on how society as we know it affects the environment.

In conclusion, eco-criticism in the above-mentioned short stories in English literature examines the representation of nature, human-nature relationships, environmental justice, ecological awareness, and the healing power of nature in literary works. By analyzing these themes and aspects, eco-criticism offers insights into how authors portray the environment and its relationship with human society in their short stories, and how these portrayals reflect cultural, social, and environmental attitudes and values. Because of our overconfidence in our ability to control nature, humans have become disconnected from the natural world, which is clearly the source of today’s environmental catastrophes. In this dire scenario, increasing ecological consciousness is the fundamental solution.

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