

The Ecocritical Theory

- Ecocriticism is the analysis of literary texts in terms of ecology.
- It is a portmanteau made of “ecology” and “criticism”
- Ecology: the study of the relationships between living organisms and their interactions with their natural or developed environment.
- Meaning of Interaction: Man can have a positive / negative effect on Nature. Nature can have a positive / negative effect on Man
- “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” (Cheryll Glotfelty's, *The Ecocriticism Reader*, 1996, p. xviii)
- Who is Cheryll Glotfelty? She is a professor of literature and the environment at the University of Nevada, Reno.
- It goes by other names: Green Studies, Eco-poetics, Environmental Literary Criticism
- Authors have described nature before, but ecocriticism is not only limited to show that a writer is describing nature or that nature is a source of inspiration. It also describes how nature functions as an important factor in a literary text, how place or the environment looms in the text as a prime mover or shaper of destinies.
- Estok argues that ecocriticism is more than “simply the study of Nature or natural things in literature; rather, it is any theory that is committed to effecting change by analyzing the function—thematic, artistic, social, historical, ideological, theoretical, or otherwise—of the natural environment, or aspects of it, represented in documents (literary or other) that contribute to material practices in material worlds”. (Estok, Simon C. (2005). "Shakespeare and Ecocriticism: An Analysis of 'Home' and 'Power' in King Lear." *AUMLA* 103 (May 2005): 15-41)
- What is the human perception of nature? How has man’s view of nature changed throughout history? What ecological lessons do we learn from literary texts? What are the environmental problems discussed in literary texts? What solutions do authors provide for environmental issues?

- Example from everyday life: Social Distance: Public Zone, Social Zone, Personal Zone, Intimate Zone. People from the cities are considered rude by the countryside people because city people keep a close distance during a conversation.
- The opening scene of *Death of a Salesman*: “A melody is heard, played upon a flute. It is small and fine, telling of grass and trees and the horizon. The curtain rises. Before us is the salesman’s house. We are aware of towering, angular shapes behind it, surrounding it on all sides. Only the blue light of the sky falls upon the house and forestage; the surrounding area shows an angry glow of orange. As more light appears, we see a solid vault of apartment houses around the small, fragile-seeming home. An air of the dream clings to the place, a dream rising out of reality.” Extract: “ Willy: Gee, on the way home tonight I’d like to buy some seeds.” / “Linda [laughing]: That’d be wonderful. But not enough sun gets back there. Nothing’ll grow anymore.”
- The opening chapter of Thomas Hardy’s novel *The Return of the Native* titled “The Three Women”. Egdon Heath. Egdon Heath is a fictitious area of Thomas Hardy’s Wessex inhabited sparsely by the people who cut the furze (gorse) that grows there. The entire action of Hardy’s novel *The Return of the Native* takes place on Egdon Heath, and it also features in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and the short story *The Withered Arm* (1888). The area is rife with witchcraft and superstition.
- *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Brontë’s only novel, was published in 1847 under the pseudonym “Ellis Bell”.
- *The Shining* (movie)
- The difference between ecopoetry and nature poetry. Nature poetry is the umbrella term. A nature poem may or may not be an ecopoem. An ecopoem is about the environment which may or may not be nature.
- “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud”
Pensive: deeply thoughtful: thinking deeply about something, especially in a sad or serious manner. Sprightly: vigorous: full of life and vigor, especially with a light and springy step. Jocund: cheerful.

The Structuralist Theory

- Logocentric: regarding words and language as a fundamental expression of an external reality. Structuralism privileges structure to logocentric meaning
- The traditional logocentric system is based on Plato's theory. It says that there are ideas behind words. Words were created to express ideas. First there are ideas, then people invented words to express these ideas. Adam naming the animals
- This emphasis on structure may confuse structuralism with formalism
- Founders:
 - Ferdinand de Saussure (Swiss Linguist)
 - Saussure rejected the logocentric theory. He said no ideas exist before words. Language unites a concept with a sound image. He called the concept the signified and he called the sound image a signifier. Example: tree. Both signifier and signified make a "sign". The word is the sign. The sound of the word is a signifier. He says the signified has no pre-existent status. There is no idea behind the word. There is nothing behind the word "tree". It is a tree because we call it a tree.
 - The relation between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary. Otherwise, we would have one language in the world. The Babel incident in the Bible. Saussure says there is no language of Adam.
 - Each sign is part of a greater system or "structure" of signs. This structural system goes vertically and horizontally. Like the Cartesian system of quadrants.
 - The meaning of each sign arises from the differences it has from other signs in the system.
 - Saussure calls this system "langue". A specific instance of speech or writing is called "parole". Saussure is not interested in the parole. He is interested in the langue.
 - Vertical meaning: Paradigmatic (why a sign was chosen instead of a synonym) synchronic (how the sign interacts with the existing structure as you freeze the system and look at it).
 - Horizontal meaning: syntagmatic (how the sign functions in terms of syntax and grammar) diachronic (how the structure or sign system changes through history).
 - Claude Lévi-Strauss (French anthropologist)
- Who applied it to literature:
 - Roman Jakobson (Russian linguist and literary theorist)

- Roland Barthes (French literary theorist)
- Michel Foucault (French philosopher and historian)
- Saussure and Barthes are synchronic. Foucault is diachronic.
- This structure or system of signs is not a gift that fell from heaven. Society created it. It also creates meaning according to the way it was created.
- Saussure destroys the traditional system of meaning. He destroys the tradition of ontology set by Plato. Plato was an ontologist and so were his followers. Ontology is the study of existence. It believes that there is a source of ideas for language. Plato calls them pre-existing “forms”. Others like Kant rejected ontology and replaced it with epistemology, which still claims there is a source for language, but this time not eternal, but subjective and inward.
- Binary Oppositions (BOs): Antonyms (near and absolute) versus Synonyms
- Binary Oppositions in Poe’s short story “The Oval Portrait”