

## Sustainable Development in English Literature: An Eco-Critical Study

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### Abstract:

One of the most important scope of sustainable development is nature. A well-being human depends on nature. Without a prosperous environment, there is no chance for attaining tangible progress. reaching sustainable development. That is why one has the responsibility to alert the sense of taking care of nature. Writers in general and authors of literature in specific and through their literary works often highlight the environmental themes encouraging readers to evaluate and protect nature.

That is why it is important to adjust curricula to suit educating for sustainable development (ESD) to create this sense of awareness in students. It is our life and we are all responsible for it. Therefore, concentrating on the role of the educators, leaders and individuals as decision makers is really effective in this respect. The relationship between environment and literature is actually a contemporary filed of criticism referred to as 'ecocriticism'; reflecting society's concern for environmental issues.

**Keywords:** Ecology, Eco-Criticism, Sustainable development, Emerson

### التنمية المستدامة في الادب الانكليزي: دراسة بيئية نقدية

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### المستخلص

الطبيعة هي أحد أهم مجالات التنمية المستدامة. يعتمد الإنسان على الطبيعة. فبدون بيئة مزدهرة، لا توجد فرصة لإحراز تقدم ملموس للوصول إلى التنمية المستدامة. هذا هو السبب في أن المرء يتحمل مسؤولية تنبيه الشعور بالعناية بالطبيعة. غالبا ما يسلط الكتاب بشكل عام ومؤلفوا الأدب بشكل خاص ومن خلال أعمالهم الأدبية الضوء على الموضوعات البيئية التي تشجع القراء على تقييم الطبيعة وحمايتها.

### Aims of the Study:

The elite have a basic role in the field of Sustainable Development specially for decisions makers to realize the suitable and effective conclusion to save our world before it is too late. Teachers are one of the powerful decision makers due to their role and effect on many levels. It is through literary texts and by using ecocriticism theory, the importance of nature to human life is going to be presented.

### Questions to be answered:

- Q1: How the sustainable development could be more effective though English Literature.
- Q2: How could we attain suitable development in our everyday life.
- Q3: What is the responsibility of teacher towards sustainable development.
- Q4: How can ecocriticism be effective to sustainable development.

### Methods of Research:

Ecocriticism: is a field of study that studies the natural world in relation to human life and how it is applied to literature, through the lens of modern environmental anxieties (Glottfelty). Ecocriticism is not only a literary theory but it is also a cultural theory, that started in the 1990s, and has been divided into

three major waves. The first wave of ecocriticism overlooks theoretical and political dimensions. The second wave deals with analysing ecological ruin. On the other hand, the third wave promotes a global understanding of worldly practice (Buell, 33). All the waves criticize the irresponsible human practice in nature and try to suggest the means to coexist or cope with it.

### Introduction:

This paper concentrates on the role of literature, which is the mirror of life, to illuminate the advantages of a healthy nature, by adopting the ecocriticism theory. Ecocriticism is the method that studies the relation of man to nature. By analyzing literary works through an eco-critical lens, readers will be able to understand and develop their attitudes to form an environmental awareness for sustainable development. Nature is an inexhaustible source and people should take care of it if they want to survive in this planet. In English literature many writers wrote about nature and its effect on human life, so it is through literature one can see and educate how to deal with nature. In “The world is too much with us”, the English Romantic poet, blames people (including himself) for their lack of communication with nature saying “we lay waste our powers; / Little we see in Nature that is ours; / We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!” (Wordsworth)

Sustainable development is a way of thinking about the future of environment, society and the economical consideration to improve the quality of our lives. A healthy society needs a healthy environment to supply clean drinking water, fresh air and enough food for its people. But unfortunately, serious threats are approaching to loom large and effect the different aspects of life and destroying the harmony between man and nature. This should oblige people to be responsible to protect it from any harm. To achieve such results of higher quality of life, industrial countries should reduce unsustainable way of life by understanding the local issues in a global context to create a realization of how to deal with nature (Garrard, 24).

Nature provides us with vigorous resources such as air, water, food and energy. Besides it can be positive or negative depending on how its natural resources are used. Nature can give positive solutions for economic, social and environmental outcomes only if man use it wisely, and that is the goal. Actually, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 to address global challenges and create a more sustainable and equitable world. Writers have reflected such issues in the different literary works aiming to adopt positive changes in society. They used to envision nature as a mother associated with positive values. It is a food provider and a place in which people can find peace, love, protection and love.

This study delves into the influence of the SDGs on the themes, narratives, and discourse within English literature. It explores how writers, in their literary works, have responded to the call for sustainability, social justice, nature and environmental responsibility. Through an analysis of specific examples and references, it demonstrates how English literature has become a powerful tool in promoting awareness and action in line with the SDGs.

### Nature in English Literature:

Literature often portrays nature's beauty and power. Authors of literature tend to use mountains, forests, rivers and other natural elements as the background of their literary works or as metaphors to present variety of meanings to these elements. All that shapes the connection of man with nature. The importance of nature is rooted back in the early works of writers like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, who played a vital role in establishing the genre and inspired many writers to shed light on the importance of environment on human life. Thanks to their works that paved the way to the foundation of eco-literary movement of nowadays. Gouli asserts that “...Emerson occupies significant role in discussing about the value of nature in the life of human beings. For him nature is a source of creations, energy and tranquility” (Gouli, 71). Meehan believes that Emerson's ideas, “appropriate for the increasingly material interests and scientific concepts of environmental scholarship” (Meehan, 214). While Sharma believes that Thoreau elevates the concept of “...ecocriticism further to have

interdisciplinary impact beyond prejudice to create a 'universal discipline' to discuss, innovate and create healthy literature-environment anthology to live in for progenies" (Sharma, 25). Their writings called for a close relation with the natural world and advocated harmony with nature. They laid to the foundation for the eco-literary movement to continue to evolve today.

God created a world fully suitable for all humanity; whether green spaces, mountains, valleys, various planets, trees, water, air, even animals all are a perfect balance for this world. Emerson demonstrate that perfection and even he wrote many works glorifying nature 'friendship', 'love' 'self-reliance', 'spiritual laws' and 'compensation'. Just like humans, trees breathe; humans inhale oxygen and exhale carbon dioxide while trees do the opposite. Actually, it is not just a matter of oxygen provider, but it is a healer. That mutual relation with nature's beautiful sights and harmonious sounds of nature can alleviate stress. In his essay 'Nature' Emerson describes the presence of "... nature, a wild delight runs through the man, in spite of real sorrows. Nature says, -- he is my creature, and maugre all his impertinent griefs, he shall be glad with me" (Emerson, 66). Many studies prove that viewing green spaces can lower cortisol levels, reduce blood pressure, and stimulate relaxation (Gies, p.7). Wandering in a park or sitting beneath a shade of trees can do wonders for soothing the body and mind. Honestly, it is through nature we see the perfection of God. And one can understand the relationship between God, nature and Man in a meaningful way. In his writings he French philosopher J.J. Rousseau regards man as "a noble savage" as long as he is close to the natural world. When he leaves his paradise, he would be corrupted by conventional morality (Woolfson, 9).

No one better than the Native Americans have deep hold and respect for nature (Booth, 329). Native Americans strongly believe that all objects and elements; (including rivers, mountains or thunderstorm), on earth whether living and nonliving, have a spirit that provides power and energy which is part of the great universe. One of the well-known Native American poets is Joy Harjo. Jabbar in her "*Nature and Spirituality in the Poems of Joy Harjo*" describes her poetry as;

..... deeply connected to nature and filled with spiritual elements. She beautifully incorporates nature as imagery, metaphor, and symbolism to delve into themes of cultural identity, belonging, and spirituality. Through the interplay of nature and spirituality, Harjo conveys a powerful message of interconnectedness and respect for all living beings (Jabbar, 105).

'Eagle Poem' is one of Harjo's famous poems that describes and analysis nature in a spiritual way. Harjo is interested in the interconnectedness of all living beings by a clear imagery and powerful language. The poem is not only about an eagle flying over the river in Arizona, it is much more than that. It is the interest of life and nature and the eagle is part of that nature. The poet describes the cycles of life and how it is connected with nature. Using the symbol of the eagle and his circle movement in the sky, to signify self – acceptance, peace and spirituality. In this poem, she asserts that the movement of this bird, symbolizes the life cycle:

Breathe in, knowing we are made of  
All this, and breathe, knowing  
We are truly blessed because we  
Were born, and die soon within a  
True circle of motion,  
Like eagle rounding out the morning  
Inside us. (Harjo)

By using the language of poetry, the poet is merges spirituality, nature, and human nature. He indirectly says the cycle movement depicts the cycle of life that keeps on moving. From an ecocritical view, man is strongly related to nature, so loosing this connection and spirituality leads to deterioration for life cycle.

Another writer who wrote about the beauty of nature, is Horatio Alger Jr. He is an American novelist and poet. In his poem, "Apple Blossoms" describes nature in a sensual manner:

I lie on a couch of downy grass,  
With delicate blossoms strewn,  
And I feel the throb of Nature's heart  
Responsive to my own.  
Oh, the world is fair, and God is good,  
That maketh life so dear;  
For is not this the rare, sweet time  
(Horatio)

The speaker in that poem, and by using simple language, finds joy and satisfaction in the scented garden, where apple blossoms are in full bloom. The poem illustrates a sense of gratitude to the beauty of the natural world. One senses healing mediation through these words.

Nature is his mentor for William Wordsworth, the famous Romantic poet, he personifies nature. He believes that there is a divine spirit in all the objects of Nature and so they have healing power. In his "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud", Wordsworth identifies himself as a cloud that wanders saying:

I wandered lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,  
.....  
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,  
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.  
.....  
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought  
What wealth the show to me had brought:  
.....  
And then my heart with pleasure fills,  
And dances with the daffodils (William Wordsworth).

Nature for Wordsworth as "... a teacher whose wisdom we can learn, and without which any human life is vain and incomplete." (Pandey, 1089).

### Environmental Justice:

Due to the civilization in Modern age, one can see environmental changes that are caused by factors, pollution, urbanization and economic growth. The changes caused degradation and corruption of both society and individuals, who have lost their spirituality, intuition and moral values. Rusetuka wrote in his study about the importance of the balance of nature, showing the disaster of people who are cutting down trees in the forest to obtain wood for fuel and manufacturing.

Trees reduce the amount of storm water runoff, which reduces erosion and pollution in our waterways and may reduce the effects of flooding but when they are cut they cause flooding which erodes people's houses and cause losing lives (Rusetuka, 60).

It is the need for materialism in the age of industrialisation, trees are cut, water & air are polluted that cause climate changing. Not surprisingly, lack access to healthy environment that used to be a source of spiritual meditation, leads to isolation, loss of inspiration and psychological suffering. All that were reflected in the works of literature.

Charles Dickens the Victorian novelist, illustrates how man started to change at the age of materialism and factories, that lead to social evils and lack of morals. In *Hard Times* Mr. Gradgrind, the teacher never calls student by names but by numbers: 'Girl number twenty possessed of no facts, in reference to one of the commonest of animals!' (Dickens). It is a way to dehumanize man by distilling people from their identity into just numbers. If you have a penny, you worth a penny, that is how man being evaluated by

materialistic values. In one of the best descriptions of London, the industrial town, that lost its natural features;

It was a town of red brick, or of brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it; but as matters stood, it was a town of unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage. It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever, and never got uncoiled. It had a black canal in it, and a river that ran purple with ill-smelling dye, and vast piles of building full of windows where there was a rattling and a trembling all day long, and where the piston of the steam-engine worked monotonously up and down, like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness (Dickens, 39).

Dickens in *Hard Times* really illustrates a vivid image of industrialization and its effect on the life of its citizens. From the title of the novel one can realize how life is becoming 'Hard'. Because of the factories in a town of coke, the smoke fills the sky and soot's the buildings, walls and souls of its citizens. Indicating loss of morals and humanity, no wonder the 'times' are hard in 'Hard Times'. Dickens was reflecting one of the worst times in England through this novel.

Instead of Nature being a source of inspiration it became a source of destruction, Alfred, Lord Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (1837-38), writes an elegy to his friend with lines like "Nature, red in tooth and claw," which evoke a blood-thirsty conception of the world. By mixing his feeling with nature as if they share the same feelings he says: "I sometimes hold it half a sin / To put in words the grief I feel: For words, like Nature, half reveal And half conceal the Soul within". (Tennyson). By expressing these words one can clarify "the artistic analysis of these texts" as Prof. Khwaf & Al Jubouri puts it and "elucidated the difference in directing the expression among these poets, each according to their emotional and sentimental experience". (Prof. Khwaf & Al Jubouri)

Nature is the protagonist in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* (1878). Most of the works of Hardy is about landscape and nature, his interest in nature is explained because he spends most of his childhood in a countryside. Nature for him is a power of fate that can soothe and destroys at the same time. Since he is a countryman, so he witnessed the changes that lay on the countryside land due to industrialization that changed the spiritual view of nature.

*In Return to the Native*, Hardy not only gives nature the protagonist role but he humanized it. The residents of Egdon heath, according to Lance Butler, have different reaction to their nature, it becomes a source of fate according to their reactions towards nature (33). Eustacia Vye; is born in a town and decided to return to the Heath where her grandfather lives, but she did not like it and considers it her enemy especially when the heavy rain and storm was about to destroy her. She despises that place, as she walks towards Rainbow she trips "over twisted furze-roots, tufts of rushes, or oozing lumps of fleshy fungi, which at this season lay scattered about the heath like the rotten liver and lungs of some colossal animal" (Hardy, 420). As Eustacia lost her life, Wildeve choose to travel in the storm at night, and again he disregards the rules of the heath, which causes the end of his life. Finally, Hardy in his *The Return of the Native*, warning man from disrespecting natural world otherwise it will lead to his death whether spiritually or even physically.

Life becomes harsh, and it is reflected in the language of authors, echoing the harsh reality of Modern Man. Mathew Arnold's 'Dover Beach' (1851) wrote:

The Sea of Faith  
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore  
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.  
But now I only hear  
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar  
(Arnold)



Comparing faith to sea is one of the best illustrating views. Since sea water is low now, resembles the lack of faith. One can hear the “naked shingles” representing the coin sounds of materialism, that anyone can hear if faith becomes low. The language that mingles nature with spirituality becomes meaningful.

Sea, land and nature become waste if man disrespect it. The infertility of the land indicates the infertility of humanity. Likewise in ‘Dover Beach’, T.S. Eliot’s “The Waste land” tolerates for being in charge for salvation in a modern society where sterility and sickness spread. The death and waste generated upon the land and modern people. Eliot in his *The Wasteland* describes the harsh reality:

Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song.  
The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,  
Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends

.....

Here is no water but only rock  
Rock and no water and the sandy road

People throwing wastes in the river; like empty bottles, cigarette ends and papers of sandwiches causing pollution. “If there were water, we should stop and drink \ Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think” (Eliot), if the environment is unhealthy it causes unhealthy mindset of humanity. Because the source of inspiration is polluted, or maybe “Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit/ Here one can neither stand nor lie nor sit” (Eliot). The breakdown of the land, it is actually in the individual psyche. The wasteland stands for the infertility of modern man with his relationship with his family, God, society even with himself.

In his poetry, Ted Hughes uses animals positively to psychological inspire the mechanized modern people. They have, mental and emotional importance. In “The thought Fox”, the poet mingles his thoughts “... as a metaphor for inspiration and creative thought” and shows how this small animal inspires him, to write his poem (Benjamin, 2). In *Church Going*, by Philip Larkin, man forgets about God, neglecting churches, and stop praying and repenting their sins. “When churches fall completely out of use \ What we shall turn them into, if we shall keep” (Larkin), the houses of God are empty symbolizing the emptiness of human soul (Larkin, 12).

The Environment has justice, Nature gets angry if Man do not respect it, it will show its anger through floods, earthquakes and in being infertile. In S.T. Coleridge’s “The Ancient Mariner”, nature avenges itself for the crime of shooting albatross. (Parsons, 120). While in “The Listener’s” Walter de la Mare gives the animals a spiritual importance by letting them join the world of the traveler. (Yousaf, 38). So Man has to awake and return to nature, let us love each other and love the world that God created. Save it by implanting green everywhere, maybe we return healthy like we used to be. Being healthy make us think in a healthy way and regaining our relation with God. Before it is too late.

## Conclusion:

The mother earth is part and parcel of our life on this planet. Philosophers, poets and novelists have touched upon the importance of the relationship between nature and the world of man. As a result, it has a strong presence in literature in all times. The critical theory that confines itself to the study of nature in literature is called ecocriticism. It is relatively a modern theory that studies the environment in relation to the human beings.

The study of nature in literature takes emotional, mental, psychological, spiritual, political, and economical dimensions. It is seen as a mother, a healer, a source of inspiration for poetic creativity. As a manifestation of God’s presence in the universe. Politically speaking, nature is associated with the history of a certain place and the identity of its people.

If People have to survive, their human nature should be in good terms with the kingdom of nature. Man and nature should live as friends not enemies. Literature has kept the memory of nature alive at the back of our minds. All what we need is always to read the book of nature for inspiration, wisdom and on the top of all for survival.

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