

Challenging Anthropocentrism in Eco-Science Fiction Novels

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By

Fatma Gamze Erkan

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INTRODUCTION

The human species has always interacted with nature because of the need for entities outside itself to survive. Maintaining a harmonious relationship between humans and nature is possible by making the minimum use of natural resources in line with the needs of human beings and by not engaging in behaviour that would disrupt the unity of the Earth. In this context, in the beginning, nomadic human societies had a close relationship with nature and continued their existence in healthier ecosystems compared to today. However, when humans gave up the hunter-gatherer lifestyle and transitioned to sedentary life in the Neolithic Era, which started with the invention of agriculture, problems began to emerge in the relationship between humankind and nature. It is plausible to say that with the development of humanity's great cultural worlds and civilizations, humans' attitudes towards nature and other life forms on Earth have become oppressive and even destructive.

Indeed, the industrial, commercial, and technological developments of the eighteenth century have strengthened the sedentary lifestyle that has been maintained for thousands of years, and as a result, environmental damage has increased even more. In today's consumer society, where nature is seen as a commodity, the degree of destruction has reached such a level that it has become naturally irreparable. Environmental problems, which cause harm to both nature and humans themselves, have become global. Thomas Berry calls this "a deep cultural pathology" that originated in Western society and has now spread around the world.¹ He states that, through industrial exploitation, the whole planet is being ravaged. The air, the water, and the land are all heavily contaminated with chemicals that were unheard of in earlier times. Numerous living species' habitats suffer permanent harm. Nevertheless, the human being now discovers that the damage done to nature is coming back to threaten the human species itself as a result of this global disruption of the biosphere by human actions.

It is obvious that environmental problems arise because humankind currently has such an extreme, even abnormal, obsession with its own comfort and convenience that it is inclined to deplete all of Earth's resources

¹ Thomas Berry, "The Viable Human," in *Deep Ecology for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. George Sessions (Boston & London: Shambhala Publications, 1995), 9.

in order to meet its own desires. However, it is ignored that the “viability of the human species” is inextricably linked to the “viability of the earth.”² Human needs cannot be met when natural resources such as the earth, air, and water have been severely polluted.

Environmental destruction, which is among the major problems of the modern period, is one of the most discussed and solution-oriented issues of today. In particular, the realisation that humans not only harm nature but also directly and indirectly harm themselves has prepared the ground for academicians from different disciplines to raise awareness by talking more and writing extensively on the subject. As a result of the increasing environmental problems, the authors have started to focus on nature in their literary works, dealing with human-nature relationships. In order to reveal the seriousness of the situation, terrifying scenarios awaiting humanity have been produced, and these have also been the subject of literary works. Many assumptions about the end of the world have been made, and various pieces of information have been provided to prevent a scary end. Moreover, the scale of the destruction and the disasters it may cause have been fictionally explained with statistical data. As a result, “ecocriticism” or “environmental criticism,” which is a literary approach that examines the relationship between literature and the physical world, has emerged.

While ecocriticism, which has an interdisciplinary structure, investigates exactly what is meant by the word nature, it also investigates human perceptions of natural life and how this perception has changed throughout history. Ecocriticism also considers how today’s environmental issues are mirrored in popular culture and literature. Based on this, the aim of this study is to examine how British eco-science fiction novels, namely John Christopher’s *The Death of Grass* (1956), J.G. Ballard’s *The Drought* (1965), Brian Aldiss’s *Earthworks* (1965), and John Brunner’s *The Sheep Look Up* (1972), create a nature-centred narrative against destructive human actions shaped by the anthropocentric perspective and the negative effects of these actions, particularly environmental disasters, on nature, culture, and all living things, in the light of ecocritical theory.

The first chapter of this study is devoted to defining ecocriticism as a theory that deals with the relationship between the environment and literature since its emergence. This chapter, beginning with the definition of the concept of ecology, covers the origins, history, development, and definitions of British ecocriticism, respectively. It also explores pastoral literature and British Romanticism, which paved the way for the formation of ecocriticism. Along with these two earlier literary traditions, some

² Ibid.

important works by eminent scholars have contributed to the development of this discipline. In particular, the contributions of Aldo Leopold and Rachel Carson to the advancement of the modern environmental movement and ecocriticism cannot be overlooked. Therefore, the two most significant examples of modern environmental writing, namely Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* (1949) and Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), are also examined in the first chapter. The last part of this chapter focuses on the waves of ecocriticism, which were first suggested by Lawrence Buell and later developed by Scott Slovic to establish a theoretical framework for ecocriticism.

Following the introduction of the theoretical background, the second chapter elaborates on the science fiction genre and its contribution to environmental criticism. Ecological consciousness can be seen in a wide range of genres, and science fiction is one of them. Ursula K. Heise remarks that science fiction is one of the contemporary genres in which problems about ecology and environmental issues are most prevalent. It is one of the genres that has continuously and boldly addressed environmental problems and their challenge to humanity's vision of the future.³ Therefore, science fiction, though underappreciated, is a very significant and valuable literary genre for ecocritical studies. After defining the broad and immensely complicated science fiction genre, this chapter briefly details the apocalyptic/post-apocalyptic fiction and dystopian fiction narratives to which the selected novels belong. To put it briefly, apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction frequently focuses on a cataclysmic event that destroys the planet. If the disaster takes place throughout the narrative, it is defined as apocalyptic; if the catastrophe has already occurred, it is defined as post-apocalyptic. Dystopian fiction, on the other hand, is set in a world where humans live in deplorable conditions as a result of oppression and suffering.

However, it is important to emphasise that not all works of dystopian fiction include disasters, and not all disaster narratives depict a dystopian world. Classical dystopian fiction, such as George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), depicts societies in which political, economic, and social structures ruin the lives of people and deprive them of all necessities and opportunities. Disaster fiction, on the other hand, deals with natural or human-made catastrophes that significantly change a society in every sense. Besides, while environmental disasters lay the foundation for a dystopian society, a dystopian regime further increases environmental degradation, creating a paradoxical vicious circle.

³ Ursula K. Heise, "Forum on Literatures of the Environment," *PMLA* 114, no. 5 (1999): 1097.

Following the explanation of the differences between these three narratives, what eco-science fiction is and why the selected four novels are categorised as such is clarified. Eco-science fiction is a subgenre of science fiction that focuses on ecology and human interaction with the environment. The focus of this fiction is on global ecological problems like climate change, pollution, famine, drought, and overpopulation, which pose a threat to all living beings on Earth, including humans. In this sense, eco-science fiction tries to raise awareness about the environmental crisis by extrapolating and presenting such disaster scenarios. Hence, it encourages humans to stop and think about their current situation as well as the environment they live in.⁴ In other words, one of the aims of eco-science fiction literature is to lay the groundwork for environmental consciousness, which is required to grasp not just how humankind is connected to the natural world but also what causes its alienation.

Actually, scrutinising the interaction of humans with nature from the beginning of history to the present demonstrates that environmental problems are mostly caused by a human-centred mentality and approach. As William Rueckert indicates, in terms of ecology, humans' tragic flaw is their anthropocentric worldview and their obsession with taming, domesticating, violating, and exploiting everything in nature.⁵ Therefore, in order to better understand this point of view and how it affects the relationship of humans with the environment, the second chapter focuses on the concept of anthropocentrism. The nature-centred ethical approaches proposed as a response to the anthropocentric worldview, notably biocentrism, ecocentrism, and deep ecology, are also explored in depth in this chapter in order to provide the essential framework for analysing the novels.

In the subsequent chapters, Christopher's *The Death of Grass*, Ballard's *The Drought*, Aldiss's *Earthworks*, and Brunner's *The Sheep Look Up*, all of which have important places in the field of eco-science fiction, are examined in terms of the way they deal with the interaction of the environment and humans and the way they depict environmental catastrophes. However, before analysing the novels, brief biographical information about the lives and works of the authors is provided. This short background

⁴ Patrick D. Murphy, "The Non-Alibi of Alien Spaces: SF and Ecocriticism," in *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*, ed. Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2001), 263.

⁵ William Rueckert, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism," in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), 113.

information is crucial in understanding the authors' views and stances on environmental problems and ecological issues, both in real life and in their fictional works.

The first novel examined in the third chapter is John Christopher's *The Death of Grass*, which was published in 1956. Belonging to the post-apocalyptic science fiction sub-genre, this novel is about a virus that first destroys rice plants in East Asia and then attacks all crops around the world, causing a massive famine. The narrative tells the story of two families who set out to take shelter on the farm of their acquaintances, wandering across England and experiencing some unpleasant events on the way. Throughout their journey, they encounter all forms of barbarism and violence. This chapter discusses how Christopher depicts the consequences of the anthropocentric approach to eradicating the virus and dealing with the disaster. The characters' relationships with each other and their reactions to the catastrophe are also explored. Christopher warns against placing too much faith in science to handle ecological problems in his novel by highlighting the fragility of both the ecosystem and civilization. Hence, how Christopher positions humans in the face of an ecological disaster and how he represents the capabilities and limitations of science and "developed" Western countries to solve the virus problem are examined in this chapter.

In the fourth chapter of this study, J. G. Ballard's *The Drought* (aka *The Burning World*), published in 1965, is analysed. The novel tells the story of an Earth on the brink of extinction, where a worldwide drought caused by industrial waste has forced humankind to search for water in a life-or-death situation. The industrial toxic waste spilled into the ocean generates an oxygen-permeable block of saturated long-chain polymers that inhibits evaporation and breaks the rain cycle, resulting in a global drought. As a result of the drought, the world turns into a vast desert, forcing people to rush to the oceans to find water. The Earth begins to transform slowly; concrete cities become surrounded by hot seas of sand, and the seashore recedes, revealing new crystal-salt deserts. Fires turn forests and buildings into white ashes. All living things in the ecosystem gradually perish, and civilization collapses. Accordingly, this chapter examines how Ballard, in his remarkable novel, describes the dimensions and consequences of human-induced actions and how he embraces the philosophy of deep ecology, which permeates the novel. The impact of the depicted ecological disaster not only on nature but also on culture and civilization is also evaluated. Since this post-apocalyptic novel focuses on the drastic change of the ecosystem and the progress of the characters towards a new and completely altered relationship with the environment, how Ballard

considers the effect of the changing physical world on the psychology of the characters is also investigated.

In the fifth chapter, Brian Aldiss's dystopian science fiction novel, *Earthworks*, published in 1965, is scrutinised. The novel focuses on an environmental disaster caused by overpopulation and envisions a world dominated by extreme socio-economic inequality. Most of the population in the depicted world lives in elevated cities, while the desolate countryside is ruled by a rich and privileged farmer class. As industrial agriculture has devastated lands, the worker population, punished for minor crimes, is compelled to work on farmlands poisoned with chemicals to raise food. In this context, this chapter focuses on how Aldiss deconstructs the anthropocentric perspective and portrays the effects of overpopulation on nature, culture, and humanity. The chapter also examines the author's representation and assessment of political, economic, and technological opportunities for tackling overpopulation and related environmental problems. In the dystopian future portrayed in the novel, people are on the verge of losing their identity and humanity as a result of increased automation, the incredible exploitation of workers by farmers, and extremely poor working conditions on farmlands. In this sense, how the social implications of the environmental crisis caused by overpopulation are represented in the novel is one of the focal points of investigation in this chapter.

The sixth and final chapter analyses John Brunner's dystopian science fiction novel *The Sheep Look Up*, published in 1972, which depicts the fall of the United States in an environmental disaster resulting in widespread disease and death. The novel features multiple characters whose paths are intertwined as they struggle to cope with the drastic changes in their environment. The narrative takes place in a fictional future where most of the country is under permanent cloud cover and it is impossible to breathe without using air filter masks. Food and clean drinking water are extremely limited. Besides these, other problems addressed in the novel include an unending war, acid rain, antibiotic-resistant illnesses, epidemics, a fall in life expectancy, infertility, endangered bees, biodiversity loss, etc. The novel portrays a world in which only the wealthy can buy expensive "organic food," while the poor eat chemically processed junk food. In this chapter of the study, Brunner's depiction of these problems and his consideration of the approaches of large companies and the president of the country to environmental issues are examined, and how the novel, which focuses on Western consumption habits, reflects the impact of capitalism on the environment and people is extensively analysed.

As environmental pollution and its worldwide damage became more prevalent, so did studies focusing on environmental issues. One of the literary genres dealing with this topic is science fiction, which offers predictions about the future and warns against impending dangers. Eco-science fiction narratives, in particular, effectively depict the harmful impacts of reckless human behaviour on the environment and all life forms. Although different factors cause the environmental disasters described in these fictional narratives, they all have one thing in common: they underline how serious and dangerous the consequences of environmental problems might be.

In light of all this information, while discussing the interaction between the physical world and society, the role of anthropocentric actions in the environmental disasters described in the novels is questioned. In these novels, which fictionalise that the consequences of environmental problems can be diverse but equally serious, it is examined how even the smallest damage caused by human beings to the environment negatively affects them along with other living beings and the ecosystem they need in order to live and flourish. In conjunction with these, the reasons and conditions that push characters in the novels to ignore and harm the environment are also scrutinised. While examining how and why the environmental problems in the novels have arisen, it is evaluated whether the authors propose solutions to these problems and, if so, what they are.

CHAPTER I

ENVIRONMENT AND LITERATURE

The human population has grown so much over the past few centuries that it has had an impact on almost every life form on the planet. Even though the flora and fauna are constantly evolving on Earth, the force exerted upon them by the human species has been tremendous. Throughout the world, countless species have vanished, and ecosystems have been transformed at unpredictable levels and paces in a very short time. Population growth, especially in the recent century, has given rise to ecological problems since it has become necessary for human beings to utilise more and more habitats in order to obtain the required resources. Moreover, ecological destruction has been worsened by imprudent technological applications and globalisation to meet the unhealthy consumption habits of humanity, which have been historically entrenched. Many ecologists emphasise that such human activities are the main reason behind numerous environmental problems such as global warming, air and water pollution, the extinction of species, and the loss of biodiversity. According to Cheryll Glotfelty, one of the pioneer ecocritics, humanity has entered an era of “environmental limits,” in which the effects of human behaviour are endangering the planet’s vital mechanisms for maintaining life. Change is required, or else humans risk a catastrophic global event that will wipe out innumerable species and damage much of the world’s natural beauty.¹ Obviously, the activities of humans have an alarmingly awful impact on non-human life on Earth, and it will be even more terrible in the coming years if it continues like this.

This ecological concern and its reflection in literature have paved the way for a new branch of literary theory: ecocriticism. Ecocriticism, in its

¹ Cheryll Glotfelty, “Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis,” in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), xx.

general meaning, is “the study of literature as if the environment mattered.”² It is a broad term used to mention nature-oriented research in literature. However, ecocriticism does not deal only with nature writing; it examines how literature depicts the relationship between humans and nature at specific times in history, what values are attributed to nature and why, and how views and attitudes about the natural world influence literary devices and genres.³ Thus, the main purpose of ecocriticism is to study texts that epitomise environmental issues and to analyse the different ways literature deals with nature. Ecocritics scrutinise the representation of nature and environmental concerns in the works of authors, poets, and playwrights from an interdisciplinary perspective. There is still an ongoing dispute among ecocritics about the aim, scope, and methodology of ecocriticism. Yet, some of them also try to find possible solutions for improving the present environmental problems. In order to clarify how nature has found a place for itself in literature, this chapter focuses on the origin, history, and development of ecocriticism and its definitions.

From Ecology to Ecocriticism

To understand the emergence of ecocriticism and its relation to nature and literature, it is important to touch upon the concept of ecology. It comes from the Greek words *oikos*, meaning “house, dwelling place, habitation,” and *logia*, meaning “study of.”⁴ Thus, ecology can simply be described as “the study of organisms in relation to each other and to the surroundings in which they live.”⁵ Ernst Haeckel, a German zoologist, is credited with coining the term in 1866 (originally as *Ökologie* in German). The term *Oecologia*, which became “ecology” in the late nineteenth century, was initially introduced as a branch of biology that is mainly concerned with the relation of organisms to the physical environment. Thus, ecology examines the interconnectedness between the animate and inanimate and their environment from a scientific perspective.

However, as awareness about environmental issues and human-nature relationships has increased since the mid-twentieth century, ecology as a scientific term has found a place in other fields and disciplines as well.

² David Mazel, *A Century of Early Ecocriticism* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 2001), 1.

³ Heise, “Forum on Literatures,” 1097.

⁴ “Ecology,” *Online Etymology Dictionary*, accessed April 26, 2020.
<https://www.etymonline.com/word/ecology>.

⁵ Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and Environment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 152.

Similarly, ecology has come to refer to human relationships with the earth in a variety of contexts, including economic, social, cultural, and philosophical. Numerous environmental approaches, such as deep ecology, social ecology, political ecology, ecofeminism, and the ethics of ecology, have begun to question human beings' relationship to nature. Since literature is a part of human history, it is not surprising that it has become an important medium in the representation of nature-human relationships as well. Through literature, many writers and scholars have aimed to raise awareness about the significance of a peaceful relationship between human beings and other living things on Earth. Glen A. Love, one of those scholars, argues that literature's most crucial role today is to shift humans' attention to a thorough examination of their place in a world that is in danger.⁶ Therefore, literature plays a significant role in defining and shaping humankind's relationship with nature.

It is acknowledged that ecocriticism emerged as an idea in Joseph Meeker's landmark work, *The Comedy of Survival*, published in 1974. Introducing the term "literary ecology," Meeker defines it as the study of biological themes and connections found in literary works. He views it as an effort to learn more about the contributions that literature has made to the ecosystem of the human species.⁷ In this early ecocritical text, Meeker suggests that literature is imitative in its portrayal of human actions. Because the main motivations of any species, including humans, are survival and evolutionary adaptation to their surroundings, literature is a powerful medium that echoes this behaviour. His essential argument is that two opposing literary modes, tragedy and comedy, shape humans' interactions with nature. Elaborating on centuries of literary texts from Sophocles to Shakespeare, he shows how comedy is universal in the attitudes of humans, and the comic mode encourages them to maintain a harmonious relationship with nature, while tragedy misleads humans to become the exploiters of the environment.

Meeker further contends that the devastating characteristics of Western culture are established in a tragic mode. The tragic mode suggests that man is always in battle with forces larger than himself. These forces, such as "nature, the gods, moral law, passionate love, the greatness of ideas and knowledge all seem enormously above mankind and in some way determine

⁶ Glen A. Love, "Revaluing Nature: Toward an Ecological Criticism," in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), 237.

⁷ Joseph W. Meeker, *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology* (New York: Scribner, 1974), 9.

his welfare or his suffering.”⁸ The aim of tragic literature is to show that man is either equivalent to or superior to his confrontation. Tragedy, as Meeker notes, is defined by a fight between humans and natural forces. In this regard, tragedy has an anthropocentric outlook since it puts humans above all things and isolates them from nature.

Comedy, on the other hand, “is concerned with muddling through, not with progress or perfection.”⁹ It comprehends the principles of the ecosystem and urges humans to reconcile with them to the utmost. Comedy shows that despite being frail, foolish, and immoral, humans are strong. The comic hero, unlike the tragic one, does not suffer or die for his morals. So, comedy is indifferent to morality, goodness, truth, beauty, heroism, and all such abstract ideals that men claim to uphold. Its only goal is to praise life’s ability to continue against all morals and to support man’s capability for survival.¹⁰

As can be understood from what Meeker asserts, comedy encourages cooperation and union with ecological forces, while tragedy advocates a hierarchical relationship of supremacy. In their confrontation with these forces, the tragic hero dies, regardless of his morals; the comic hero, however, survives the incident. Tragedy causes cultural and natural catastrophes; comedy, on the other hand, deals with the character’s desire to survive and life’s longevity. Hence, comedy can be viewed as nature-centred in its concentration on adaptation, survival, and eventuality.

In other words, Meeker tries to emphasise the view that a human being is a part of nature and is prone to inherent defects and weaknesses. Humankind’s main motivation is survival, and this can be enabled with comic mode since it teaches the virtues of modesty and endurance to humans. Comedy reveals that the human species’ existence relies on its capacity to adjust itself and its ability to embrace limitations. In this regard, it can be stated that literature has a significant effect on human relationships with nature. Emphasising that humans are the only literary beings in the world, Meeker suggests that literature should be thoroughly and sincerely examined to learn how it affects human behaviour and the environment. According to him, this will help humans understand what, if any, role literature plays in the welfare and survival of humankind, as well as what insights it provides into its interactions with other species and the natural world. He claims that by doing so, we can determine whether it is an activity

⁸ Joseph Meeker, “The Comic Mode,” in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), 157.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 159.

that better adapts humans to the world or one that distances them from it, and whether it has a greater impact on humanity's survival than their extinction.¹¹

Meeker's remark reflects ecocriticism and environmental philosophy in suggesting that literature conditions humans' actions and their approach to nature. It provides an invaluable insight into the interactions between humans, other living things, and the earth. Considering the impact of literature on environmental issues, it can be better understood why ecocriticism attempts to explore the portrayal of nature and the relationship of humankind with its surroundings through literary works. It is because ecocriticism seeks to illustrate the unrecognised and troublesome aspects of the connection between humankind and nature. In this way, they seek to raise awareness about the consequences of anthropocentrism on humans' close and vital relationship with the earth.

Origins of British Ecocriticism

Lawrence Buell remarks at the very beginning of *The Future of Environmental Criticism* that although environmental criticism is a newly emerged theory, it dates back to ancient times. He states, "In one form or another the 'idea of nature' has been a dominant or at least residual concern for literary scholars and intellectual historians ever since these fields came into being."¹² Even a quick survey of literature throughout the centuries confirms that environmental concern has been a very old theme in literary works. A considerable amount of literary text has specifically been concerned with nature, whether to show the aesthetic admiration of its beauty or to explore its relationship with humankind.

Michael Branch, a prominent ecocritic, expresses this interest in nature with various examples, from ancient literary works to recent literature. As he contends, the idea that nature exists as a peaceful getaway from the artificial surroundings of the city was initially established through the writings of Hellenistic writers like Virgil and Horace. During the Middle Ages, writers ranging from Augustine to Aquinas supported the traditional Christian idea that nature was particularly significant as visible evidence of God's creation. Renaissance and early seventeenth-century philosophers like Bacon and Descartes hastened the birth of the modern worldview by praising rationalism and humankind's control over the natural world. In the

¹¹ Meeker, *The Comedy of Survival*, 3-4.

¹² Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 2.

eighteenth century, nature was seen as a source of inspiration and was used as a means of reflecting the inner feelings of humans, and poets such as Wordsworth and Coleridge emphasised the importance of being close to nature and tried to heal human suffering by writing poems about nature. In the nineteenth century, many writers of English and American romantic literature, from Goethe to Wordsworth to Emerson, pioneered the criticism of industrialization, which viewed nature as only a resource, a commodity. And throughout the twentieth century, writers like Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, Edward Abbey, and John Muir have been among the most powerful advocates for an ecologically holistic view of nature.¹³

It is clear that writing about themes related to nature was quite popular, even in early examples of literature. While the majority of these pieces were only about nature, some of them even addressed social and environmental issues. A review of the literature shows that ecologically based literary texts have been around since the beginning of civilization, and they can be considered forerunners of modern ecocriticism.

While formal ecocriticism practice is regarded as a relatively recent contribution to literary theory, the earliest examples of environmental writing can be observed in pastoral literature. Besides the authors and thinkers mentioned above, the actual precursors of the early UK version of ecocriticism can be traced back to British Romanticism as well. To comprehend the relationship between pastoral tradition, British Romanticism, and modern ecocritical theory, it is necessary to briefly discuss these literary traditions.

Pastoral Literature

In his book *Ecocriticism*, Greg Garrard argues that since the poetic reactions of the Romantic Movement to the Industrial Revolution, pastoralism has significantly influenced the way humans think about nature.¹⁴ According to him, in its early stages, ecology as a scientific discipline may have been influenced by pastoral tradition, and the founding text of ecocriticism, *Silent Spring*, is rooted in this tradition. Even though pastoralism, which has its origins in the classical era, is inclined to be quickly influenced by various political ideologies, for ecocritics, this trope will continue to be a significant concern.¹⁵ Therefore, to better comprehend

¹³ Michael Branch, "Ecocriticism: The Nature of Nature in Literary Theory and Practice," *Weber Studies* 11, no. 1 (Winter 1994).

¹⁴ Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 33.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

the relationship between ecocriticism and pastoral literature, it is necessary to explore the pastoral tradition's origins.

Pastoral, as a term, originates from the Latin word *pastor*, which means shepherd. As the etymology of the word suggests, pastoral mainly focuses on the depiction of the countryside and the lives of herdsmen.¹⁶ Although pastoral basically refers to a lifestyle in relation to country life, it is also the name of a literary, artistic, and musical genre that portrays such a life in an idealised way. Taking into account its definition in the literary genre, M. H. Abrams identifies pastoral as “a deliberately conventional poem expressing an urban poet’s nostalgic image of the peace and simplicity of the life of shepherds and other rural folk in an idealized natural setting.”¹⁷ So, the pastoral depicts a natural environment to which city people escape in pursuit of solitude and serenity, where they can obtain a glimpse of simple living. Similarly, Lawrence Buell defines pastoral as “a stylized representation of rusticity in contrast to and often in satire of urbanism, focusing in the first instance on the life of shepherds.”¹⁸ Hence, the pastoral tradition specifically emphasises the dichotomy between urban and rural life.

Considering that the pastoral holds a strong view of nature, authors such as Paul Alpers identifies it as a mode instead of a genre. According to him, there are several literary genres that fit this definition. It comprises not just the full spectrum of “formal eclogues—pastoral elegies, love complaints, singing-contests, and the like—but also pastoral romances, pastoral lyrics, pastoral comedies, and pastoral novels.”¹⁹ If they are all pastoral, he says, it is plausible to claim that pastoral is not a genre. Instead, it appears to be one of the literary genres, such as tragedy, comedy, novel, romance, satire, and elegy, which have names that sound general but are broader and more comprehensive than the genres themselves. It is attempted to be understood that pastoral is one of these literary genres when it is stated that it is not a genre but a mode.²⁰ Therefore, viewed interchangeably as a mode, genre, or convention, the pastoral tradition, taking place in various forms of literature such as poetry, drama, and novels, alludes to literary works that glorify country life and landscapes.

¹⁶ “Pastoral,” *Online Etymology Dictionary*, accessed September 8, 2020. <https://www.etymonline.com/word/pastoral>.

¹⁷ *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, ed. M. H. Abrams, 7th ed. (United States: Heinle & Heinle, 1999), s.v. “pastoral.”

¹⁸ Buell, *The Future*, 144.

¹⁹ Paul Alpers, *What Is Pastoral?* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 46.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

While the word pastoral has been commonly used to describe literature, art, music, and popular media in general, it emerged and evolved as a literary genre in the poetry of the Hellenistic period. Although Theocritus is credited with writing the first example of pastoral poetry that has been preserved, the interest that the Hellenistic people had in the countryside can also be seen in their culture. For instance, the philosophies of Epicureanism, with its purpose of tranquillity, and Cynicism, advocating an especially simple life that is in peace with nature, indicate the importance given to rural life. Present-day critics connect this inclination of Hellenistic society with the growing urbanisation of life and a desire for simplicity.²¹ The countryside was not uncovered all of a sudden in the Hellenistic period. Plato's *Phaedrus*, in which the townsman Socrates particularly calls attention to nature's beauty, is an especially significant source for Theocritus.²² Moreover, *Works and Days*, the didactic poem of the early Greek poet Hesiod (750–650 BC), who is a contemporary of Homer, is also a possible precursor of Theocritus's *Idylls*. In his prominent poem, *Works and Days*, Hesiod focuses on country life, farming, and human labour.

Despite the fact that there are other works and philosophies that are strikingly similar to the pastoral tradition prior to Theocritus, his *Idylls* are widely regarded as the first piece of pastoral poetry because its use of a rural setting and portrayal of shepherds as key characters living in peace with nature established the literary structure of the pastoral and provided its essential characteristics. So, the beginning of pastoral poetry, also known as “bucolic,” deriving its root from Greek *boukolos*, meaning “cowherd,” can be traced back to the third-century BC Greek poet Theocritus's *Idylls*.

Simply put, the term “idyll” means the “small picture” or “poetic vignette,” and “bucolic” is “one of the typical singers of the idyll.”²³ For Theocritus, “bucolic” poetry meant the exchange of songs in singing competitions between the herders, whether of cows, sheep, goats, or oxen. In other words, the “vignettes” of country life, which concentrate on the song competitions, are the essential poems of pastoral tradition. Hence, focused on the customs of festival singing, *Idylls* is a fictional portrayal of Sicilian shepherds' lives, in which the shepherds lived a blissful, idealised life of romance and singing.²⁴ Although the aim of Theocritus' bucolic poetry is still a point of discussion among scholars, most critics, such as

²¹ Anthony Verity, introduction to *Theocritus: Idylls*. Trans. Anthony Verity (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), xiv.

²² *Ibid.*, xv.

²³ Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, 34.

²⁴ Margaret Drabble, ed., *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, 6th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 769.

Terry Gifford, claim that the first pastoral text, the *Idylls* of Theocritus, introduced the term “idyllic” and created an idealised, nostalgic, and escapism-inspired tone in rural poetry intended for a court audience. Afterwards, all these characteristics began to be associated with pastoral definitions.²⁵ In brief, pastoral literature is based on the work of Theocritus, who depicted visions of shepherds leading happy and fulfilling lives. The emphasis on idealised rural life, regardless of form or structure, is what distinguishes the pastoral tradition.

Two centuries later, inspired by the *Idylls* of Theocritus, the Roman poet Virgil wrote a set of poems called *Eclogues*. It is a poem in the style of a conversation between two shepherds, in which Virgil depicts the harsh division between city and country life. The most important feature that distinguishes *Eclogues* in pastoral literature is that Virgil introduced the idea of Arcadia “as a literary construct of the location of pastoral retreat” to our cultural discourse.²⁶ Thus, the pastoral tradition was carried on from Greece to Rome, where the setting was shifted from Sicily to Arcadia. Leo Marx, one of the most significant critics of American pastoral, argues that while Theocritus is considered the first pastoral poet, Virgil’s *Eclogues* are the real forefather of the pastoral tradition in modern literature since Virgil “discovered” Arcadia in these poems, in which he “created the symbolic landscape, a delicate blend of myth and reality.”²⁷ In this “imaginary Arcadia,” the pastoral scenes that Virgil portrays are allegorical, in which Rome’s glory is praised, loyalty to the emperor is expressed, and a golden age is foretold. So, in *Eclogues*, Virgil “evokes a Golden Age of the past that is set against the instability and alienation of the present.”²⁸ In other words, the pastoral tradition has been used by Virgil to address the environmental problems of the Roman period.

As A. J. Boyle notes, *Eclogues* describe the destruction, breakdown, and misery brought upon rural areas by the city’s brutality in a simple and serious way. The devastation is massive, affecting the rural environment in all its forms, including plant, animal, and human, and its root is the city.²⁹ In the poem, Virgil focuses on the reality of violence, displacement, and

²⁵ Terry Gifford, “Pastoral, Anti-Pastoral, and Post-Pastoral,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Environment*, ed. Louise Westling (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 18.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

²⁷ Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (1964; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 19.

²⁸ Gifford, “Pastoral,” 19.

²⁹ A. J. Boyle, *The Chaonian Dove: Studies in the Eclogues, Georgics, and Aeneid of Virgil* (1986; repr., Leiden: Brill, 2018), 15.

suffering. *Eclogues*, which were written during a time of social unrest and political upheaval, are a reflection on the modern individual's intellectual, psychological, and spiritual fragmentation. While revealing the stark historical reality of the country's destruction caused by Rome's politico-military system, they also explore the emotional disorder and moral depravity that Virgil views as a result of city life and technological advancement.³⁰

Considering all these explanations, it can be claimed that Arcadia stands as a perfect location for a utopia in which human worries have not yet emerged. By constructing the literary Arcadia, Virgil has aimed to create "an idealised future, a restoration of rural values that urbanisation, or industrialization, or technological alienation from the earth have lost."³¹ In this sense, Virgil uses the pastoral or rural environment to reflect Rome's misery and creates an image in which the defining characteristics of modern life are observed against a backdrop of abandoned goals and forgotten dreams.³² Eventually, as Marx emphasises, the poem's entire focus is on the unity formed in the first few lines, in which Virgil refers to the significant benefits of a pastoral retreat, such as "peace, leisure, and economic sufficiency."³³ However, the key to all these blessings is the harmonious relationship between human beings and the natural world.

The pastoral tradition, which had been ignored during the Middle Ages, flourished in the Renaissance period. However, as pastoralism gained popularity during the Renaissance, the genre's classical boundaries were expanded and updated to include new elements. Rural landscapes and local villagers were portrayed in new styles and forms. Much like Virgil enhanced Theocritus' pastoral frameworks, the Renaissance poets established a modern pastoral approach while imitating the classical one. As Edmund K. Chambers indicates, the Latin eclogue experienced a revival during the Renaissance. It perfectly captured the interest of humanists, who delighted in its "artificial ring" and the chances it provided for "covert satire" of church and state.³⁴ In addition to the imitation of classical topics and styles, the pastoral was also extended to incorporate drama and romance. Both John Fletcher's *The Faithful Shepherdess* and Ben Jonson's *The Sad Shepherd* can be given as examples of English pastoral drama. Sidney's *Arcadia* and Shakespeare's *As You Like It* are examples of English Renaissance pastoral romances. During this period, pastoral literature became thoroughly "theatrical

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Gifford, "Pastoral," 21.

³² Boyle, *The Chaonian Dove*, 16.

³³ Marx, *The Machine*, 23.

³⁴ Edmund K. Chambers, *English Pastorals* (London: Blackie & Son., 1895), xxiii-xxiv. Internet Archive.

and romantic.” It became a brand-new form in which the eclogue and natural description were incorporated into the fundamentally distinct realm of an idealised romantic love.³⁵

The fundamental reason behind the revival of Renaissance pastoral literature was growing urbanisation. As Ken Hiltner emphasises, in Renaissance pastoralism, idealised landscapes frequently opposed the authority of the courts. However, the idealised and more realistic scenes of pastoral painting throughout the seventeenth century also opposed London’s unparalleled urbanisation.³⁶ Although there are exceptions, the primary theme in English Renaissance pastoral literature was London. In fact, almost every significant contributor to the growth of pastoralism in England during this era resided in or near London at one time. Also, authors who lived on the outskirts of the kingdom, such as Edmund Spenser, visited London. As a result, London occupied a prominent place in Renaissance England’s pastoral literature.³⁷ It is obvious that the unprecedented expansion of the city had serious cultural and ecological effects, which had a huge influence on Renaissance pastoralism. The dissatisfaction with rapidly growing cities pushed Renaissance people to seek happiness and prosperity in nature, which can be found in pastoral literature. The pastoral, on the other hand, did not remain a literary tradition that focused on the idealisation of nature but rather evolved into a political instrument during this century and in the centuries to come.

Considering the definition and historical development of pastoral literature, in his book *Pastoral*, Terry Gifford clarifies three kinds of pastoral. The first is a historical form with a long tradition that originated in poetry, evolved into drama, and, in recent years, became recognisable in novels.³⁸ Gifford describes this kind by referring to the classical poetry and drama that elevate rural life, originating in Greek and Roman poems and continuing in the Renaissance era. In this type of pastoral, one can therefore mention Renaissance pastoral dramas, including Shakespeare’s, or Augustan pastoral poetry like Pope’s. Alluding to these examples, it can be claimed that pastoral is a literary form, starting with Theocritus in the third century B.C., in which country life, and especially a shepherd’s life, is depicted. As Gifford suggests, up until around 1610, the word pastoral referred to poetry or dramas of a certain formal style in which fictional

³⁵ Raymond Williams, *The Country and The City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 20.

³⁶ Ken Hiltner, *What Else Is Pastoral?: Renaissance Literature and the Environment* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2011), 70.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 71.

³⁸ Terry Gifford, *Pastoral* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 1.

shepherds conversed with one another about their labour or their loves while providing mainly idealised descriptions of their rural surroundings.³⁹

In the second kind, beyond a particular literary form, pastoral is used to address a wider scope of context. Here, pastoral refers to the descriptive image of a peaceful, pleasant countryside that includes farmlands, lakes, and forests. In this sense, the second kind of pastoral focuses on the content of literary texts and is used to describe any literary work that contrasts the rural with the urban, either implicitly or explicitly. Any novel whose rural setting plays a significant part in its narrative might be considered pastoral. Because it focuses on nature, a poem about trees in town may also be called pastoral. That is, in identifying these texts as pastorals, a joyful attitude towards what they depict is assumed, no matter how bleak it appears on the surface.⁴⁰

In Gifford's third type of pastoral, the simple celebration of nature is brought into question since this type portrays rural life with pejorative definitions. For example, if a Greenpeace supporter ignores pollution or the damage that urban developers pose to city trees, they may use the term to criticise tree poetry. Here, the disparity between the natural world as depicted in literature and what actually exists will be deemed inappropriate based on ecological considerations.⁴¹ In this instance, pastoral is defined as pejorative in a critical and derogatory way since, as Gifford points out, there is a significant difference between the literary depiction of nature and material fact. Besides, the third type of pastoral serves as a literary critique of the oversimplification and idealisation of the countryside, and it tries to correct the inclination to ignore the difficulties and hard work that such places require.

Similarly, Greg Garrard distinguishes the pastoral tradition into three types. The first one, corresponding to Gifford's first kind, is "classical pastoral," which considers nature as a place where humans find harmony and self-identification. The second type is "romantic pastoral," which refers to the period after the Industrial Revolution and emphasises the value of rural freedom over urbanisation. The third is "American pastoral," which describes agricultural land as a dividing line between the wilderness and the city. In this one, land is viewed as a resource that can be used for agriculture.⁴² So, many scholars, such as Gifford and Garrard, have tried to define pastoral in literature, which is incredibly useful for understanding ecocriticism as an approach.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 2.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, 34.

To sum up, the origins of pastoralism reveal that it emerged during a time when there were numerous ecological issues that humans are now all too familiar with. It is obvious that pastoral literature did not emerge at a time when nature was viewed as flawless and remote from human intervention. The early pastoral works addressed war, violence, land invasions, and other calamities that went beyond the borders of cities and countries. As Garrard highlights, the birth of the bucolic idyll coincided strongly with widespread urbanisation during the Hellenic period. The pastoral tradition is characterised by two main contrasts from this era: “the spatial distinction of town (frenetic, corrupt, impersonal) and country (peaceful, abundant), and the temporal distinction of past (idyllic) and present (‘fallen’).”⁴³ In this sense, one of the most outstanding characteristics of pastoral literature is that it is very nostalgic since it often recalls a golden age when humans were supposed to have had a stronger, or even ideal, relationship with the environment. Therefore, even in the ancient Greek period, during the presumed Golden Age of nature, pastoral literature was important for distinguishing country life from city life, which was jeopardised by the latter’s growth. All in all, as McKusick indicates, by portraying the simple life of shepherds as a desirable contrast to the stress and wasteful lifestyles of city inhabitants, the pastoral mode was to provide one of the most resilient and influential ways of representing environmental consciousness.⁴⁴ The deterioration of city life in the following centuries and the resulting increase in environmental problems continued to be the subject of Renaissance pastoral literature. Finally, the pastoral in its original form disappeared with the emergence of Romanticism.

British Romanticism

In *Modern Environmentalism*, David Pepper states that Romanticism was a philosophical and literary movement that was widely represented in literature, art, and theatre. It was a response to “material changes” in society that followed the emergence and growth of “industrial capitalism” in the eighteenth century. During this period of transformation, production became more intense in the city. The factory system and mass production were built on methods that both released and regulated natural forces. These practices, when combined with the pursuit of profit, apparently polluted and spoiled the environment. Cities expanded to unimaginable sizes, becoming the

⁴³ Ibid., 35.

⁴⁴ James C. McKusick, *Green Writing: Romanticism and Ecology* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 20.

centres of misery and poverty. They came to symbolise “the failure of laissez-faire liberalism’s philosophy,” which argued that encouraging individuals to seek their own interests would result in an ideal society. The rational quest for economically viable production processes, such as division of tasks, time measurement, and automation, along with population migration, resulted in the alienation of people from both nature and one another. People and nature were objectified and degraded to commodity status.⁴⁵

As is obvious, the most important influence on the emergence of Romanticism was the Industrial Revolution. Awful working and living conditions and environmental destruction were closely connected to Great Britain’s industrialization and urbanisation. The increased number of factories and the need for more manufacturing supplies resulted in the devastation of rural areas across the country. Although there were problems related to nature in previous ages, environmental issues became more visible and serious during the Romantic period, which saw a drastic increase in urban populations and an industrialised economy.⁴⁶ So, the emergence of Romantic literature coincided with a time of wars and revolutions—a time of profound, terrifying, and exhilarating transformations as human civilization reorganised itself on every level.⁴⁷

Even though it is difficult to define Romanticism, it is usually identified as an intellectual movement in the history of European culture that covers the time span from the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century. While there is no consensus on a more accurate date, according to many literary scholars, the publication of William Wordsworth’s and Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 indicates the advent of British Romanticism as a literary movement. Others refer to the publication of William Blake’s *Songs of Innocence* in 1789, which coincided with the outbreak of the French Revolution, as the turning point.⁴⁸ Regarding the definition of Romanticism, René Wellek states that the basic features of Romantic literature include the celebration of emotions, subjectivity, and

⁴⁵ David Pepper, *Modern Environmentalism: An Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 189.

⁴⁶ Kevin Hutchings, “Ecocriticism in British Romantic Studies,” *Literature Compass* 4, no. 1 (2007): 175.

⁴⁷ Paul O’Flinn, *How to Study Romantic Poetry* (UK: Macmillan, 1988), 1.

⁴⁸ Kate Rigby, “Romanticism and Ecocriticism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, ed. Greg Garrard (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 60.

individuality; the interest in the past; the emphasis on the imagination; the simplicity of language; and the appreciation of nature.⁴⁹

According to the Romantics, knowledge could be obtained through feelings and senses rather than reason. So, they emphasised the importance of the free expression of an artist's feelings. This view is best explained by Wordsworth in *Lyrical Ballads*, who defines poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity."⁵⁰ In other words, poetry is an outcome of the process of imagination. The poet reflects on a sensation of "in tranquillity," after the initial feeling has faded. However, as s/he continues to think, the emotion comes back, and the poet starts to write the poem while still being affected by this fresh sense. Hence, in order to reflect these feelings, it was believed that the essence of art would have to come from the artist's imagination, and the way to do it was by taking inspiration from nature. In this sense, the Romantics highlighted the admiration of nature in art and language, as well as the feeling of sublimity through the bond with nature. In particular, nature, with all its boundless beauty, played a significant role in Romantic literature. Romantic authors and poets provided close, in-depth depictions of nature in their works by focusing on its mysterious and dynamic aspects.

As McKusick indicates, *Lyrical Ballads*, which marks the rise of Romanticism as a literary movement, is an example of a Romantic work that carries the aforementioned characteristics: "the revival of ballad stanza, reliance upon the language of everyday life, and extensive use of natural imagery drawn from direct personal observation."⁵¹ Besides, while writing *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth and Coleridge "shared a common perception of the natural world as a dynamic ecosystem and a passionate commitment to the preservation of wild creatures and scenic areas."⁵² Based on this information, it can be claimed that Wordsworth's and Coleridge's worldviews were founded on a peaceful coexistence with nature. These two Romantic poets had a very holistic approach to the Earth and proclaimed a symbiotic relationship between nature's dynamics and humans' actions. In particular, Wordsworth is frequently referred to as a model of "Romantic ecology" because of the way in which he redefines humankind as a component of nature and how he sees the relationships between all living beings.⁵³

⁴⁹ René Wellek, "The Concept of 'Romanticism' in Literary History II. The Unity of European Romanticism," *Comparative Literature* 1, no. 2 (1949): 147.

⁵⁰ William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones (London and New York, Routledge, 2005), 307.

⁵¹ McKusick, *Green Writing*, 36.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Rigby, "Romanticism and Ecocriticism," 65.

Similarly, Jonathan Bate suggests that Wordsworth should be regarded as a role model in his representation of nature because he struggled to make it easier for his readers to love or survive. He firmly placed himself in the green tradition by teaching his readers “to look at and dwell in the natural world”⁵⁴ and by encouraging them to show “respect for the earth” and to be sceptical about “economic growth and material production.”⁵⁵

William Wordsworth is accepted as the father of English nature poetry as we know it today. Throughout his poems, Wordsworth stresses the significance of nature for a human’s intellectual and emotional growth. He believes that those who have a healthy connection with nature are better able to relate to both the social and divine realms. Individuals living in cities become greedy and dishonest by detaching themselves from nature. Wordsworth portrays this outlook in his poems, such as “The World Is Too Much with Us” (1807). This poem can be interpreted as a protest against England’s quick and drastic change following the launch of industrial machines in the late eighteenth century. It criticises the deterioration of humans’ relationship with nature, condemning industrialization for exchanging that bond for material interests. This short but efficient poem states that industrial growth has displaced humans from farmlands to factories, destroying their contact with the divine and natural worlds.

In fact, besides Wordsworth, other Romantic poets were also dissatisfied with the way that industrialization turned once-beautiful areas into unrecognisable places and destroyed nature for profit. The dissatisfaction with industrialization and urbanisation was clearly reflected in the poems of the poets of this era, such as William Blake and Percy Bysshe Shelley. Apparently, the problems brought on by industrialization were well known to Romantic poets, who observed the huge difference between miserable city life and the beauty and harmony of nature. Therefore, they touched upon the environmental damage that resulted from rapid urbanisation in their works. The industrial town, as they portrayed it in their poems, in comparison to the healthy and unspoilt rural areas, was a troublesome and upsetting place.

During the Romantic period, environmental degradation was so widespread that it was impossible for the Romantics to ignore it. McKusick points out that English Romantic poets such as Blake, Coleridge, and Keats lived at the beginning of the industrial age. For them, “the green world of field and forest was a remote, mysterious, and magical place that existed in sharp disjunction from the smoke, crowded streets, and noisy machinery of

⁵⁴ Jonathan Bate, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 4.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.