

The English Novel: Interdisciplinary Approaches
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Lecture - 10
Environment and Literature

Hello student, today I am going to discuss the topic entitled 'Environment and Literature' and as you know this is the part of studying The English Novel: Interdisciplinary Approaches.

Well, when we talk of environment, this has become integral part of literary studies. These days, environment is one of the important issues while talking of interdisciplinary researches. So, literary studies has become one of the most active areas of the environmental humanities. And this course will introduce you to some of the main concern of that increasing important field.

And this talk of mine will also consider the ways that literature helps us to think about human relationship to environments, nature, places, animals, weather events and the planet. Well, keeping all this aspect in mind you can understand that how important it is to explore the various unfolding layers of environmental humanities. This course tends to develop a historical perspective on how literary and philosophical tradition such as Romanticism, Transcendentalism, Naturalism and Postmodernism mediate different understandings of the environment.

This course will also highlight the contemporary environmental questions and problems, exploring the role of literature in our present ecological crisis, especially regarding climate change and environmental justice. The environment is the collection of the socio-economic. Because when we talk of environmental studies or environmental humanities, we need to understand what do we mean by environment or ecology. So, it is a collection of the socio-economic, biological or chemical factors that make up the surroundings of a human.

The term ecology is also very, very important. It comprises both living and non-living beings that exist in agreement with one another. In representing our environment, literature plays a critical role and is the reflection of modern-day society. Ecocriticism is a term for the association among literature and the environment. As I said that this is the part of the course, reading English novels, an interdisciplinary approach.

So, when we talk of interdisciplinarity, well, we need to know about environment, culture, geography, architect. And environment is the word that comprises almost everything that is there on the earth or related to human being. Since prehistory, literature and the arts have been drawn to portrayals of physical environments and human environment interactions. The modern environmentalist movement as it emerged first in the late 19th century and in its more recent incarnation in the 1960s, yes, gave rise to a rich array of fictional and non-fictional writings concerned with humans changing relationship to the natural world.

Only since the early 1990s, however, has the long-standing interest of literary or literature studies in these matters generated the initiative most commonly known as ecocriticism. An eclectic and loosely coordinated movement, whose contribution thus far have been most visible within its home discipline of literature, but whose interest and alliances extend across various art forms and media. Literature and environment studies commonly called ecocriticism as I said earlier also or environmental criticism in analogy to the more general term literary criticism comprise an eclectic, pluriform and cross-disciplinary tentative that aims to explore the environmental dimension of literature that we have to keep in mind.

And research is going on like ecocriticism, ecology, ecofeminism. So, we need to know all such terms. Well, what are the factors, the imagination of place and place attachment? The enlistment and critique of models of scientific inquiry in the study of literature and the art. The examination of the significance of gender difference and environmental representation.

The cross-pollination of eco-critical and postcolonial scholarship as ecocriticism has extended its horizon beyond its original focus on Anglo-American imagination. Ecocriticism's evolving interest in indigenous art and thought and ecocriticism's no less keen, complex attentiveness to artistic representation and the ethics of relations between humans and animals. Well, first wave of scholarship of the 1990s tended to equate environment with nature. To focus on literary renditions of the natural world in poetry, fiction and non-fiction as means of evoking and promoting contact with it; to value nature preservation and human attachment; to place at local communitarian or bioreasonal level and to affirm an ecocentric or biocentric ethics often intensified by some conception of innate bond whether biological psychological or spiritual, conjoining the individual human being and the natural world. That is why I said that the horizon, the corpus of environmental study is very, very vast.

The phenomenological philosophy of Andre Naess, inventor of deep ecology theory, Bachelard, Merleau-Ponty and at first especially Heidegger influenced some of the strongest eco-critical work in this area. By contrast, second wave scholarship of the past decade has shown greater interest in literature pertaining to the metropolis and industrialization. Eco-criticism has tended to reject the validity of the nature-culture distinction. Sometimes to the point of following, you know, Bruno Latour's stigmatization of nature as hopelessly vague and antiquated has favored a socio-centric rather than bio-centric and/or individual-experience-oriented ethics and aesthetics placing particular emphasis on environmental justice concerns. Because we need to know the various critics, their interpretation of this kind of studies, their perception and also perspectives on such research. Related developments include the reconception of place attachment from local focus to transnational and/or global and the cross-pollination of literature, environment studies, both with post-colonial literary studies and with studies of ethnic minority literatures in addition to Native American, which has been of a strong interest from the start.

Well, these latter developments are by no means the only initiatives that have taken literature-environment studies far beyond its original base in modern anglophone writing. Well, today's literature-environment scholarship considers all area of Western history and is increasingly influenced by criticism on and/or from the non-Anglophone world, particularly Hispanic, German, Chinese and Japanese. Ecocriticism is the interdisciplinary study of the connections between literature and the environment. And this is the outcome of the discussion given by various pioneers, peers and the critics.

It draws on contributions from natural scientists, writers, literary critics, anthropologists and historians in examining the differences between nature and its cultural construction. Ecocriticism emerged in the 1960s with the start of the environmental movement and the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962, but really began to take off in the 1980s. So far, there have been two waves of ecocriticism, the first in the 1980s and the second in the 1990s. Different types of ecocriticism include pastoral, wilderness and ecofeminism. Pastoral, found primarily in British and American literature, focuses on the dichotomy between urban and rural life, often idealizing nature and rural life and demonising urban life.

There are three branches of pastoral ecocriticism and those are 'classical', 'romantic' and 'American'. 'Classical' is characterized by nostalgia and nature as a place for human relaxation and reflection. 'Romantic' is characterized by portraying rural independence as

desirable. 'American' emphasises agrarianism and represents land as a resource to be cultivated. So, ecofeminism or ecological feminism is a movement and framework that highlights the relationship between women and nature.

So, we have seen, you know, the diversification of eco-criticism and eco-feminism is one of the most important areas for research these days. So, women and nature, including the inextricable link between the operation of women and the climate crisis. It uncovers the ways in which women play a crucial role in caring for nature, and our communities through their labor and knowledge while being barred equitable access to social, political, and economic rights and benefits. By eliminating the ways in which gender-based oppression and the climate crisis are interconnected, ecofeminism strikes at the root causes of both: the extraction, exploitation and devaluing of nature and those considering other.

As climate justice and queer feminist activist Majandra Rodriguez Acha puts it, they are,

those whose bodies, lives and dignity are taken as a means to the end of accumulation: indigenous groups who have been colonized, workers on the lower rungs, black and brown, minorities and women who are at the crossroads of multiple kinds of operation.

And this quotation is really very important to understand, explore ecofeminism. So, ecofeminism is an ideology, a philosophy and a movement that sees climate change, gender equality and social injustice more broadly and intrinsically related issues all tied to masculine dominance in society.

Specifically, ecofeminism holds the most environmental issues can be traced back to the global prioritization of qualities deemed masculine, particularly the one some world regard as toxic, like aggression and domination and those in power who embody those attributes. Well, feminism in all its waves has experienced evolutions and resurgences since it formally began in the mid 1800s. As climate change awareness and subsequent activism rose in recent decades, feminists began to identify the way in which the movement for gender equality and the movement for environmental protection are related.

The term ecofeminism was coined by the French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974. According to her, "disfranchisement and oppression of women, people of colour and the poor are intrinsically linked to the degradation of the natural world, as both arose as a

result of patriarchal dominance." Over the years, many more have explored the sentiment behind ecofeminism and began advocating for it.

Women such as Vandana Shiva, founder of the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology and Carolyn Merchant, author of *Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and Scientific Revolution* are just two prominent names within this movement since its inception. Some other names of note include Val Plumwood, Greta Gaard and Susan Griffin just to name a few. Four main eco-feminist principles both the operation of marginalized groups and the operation of nature are connected by cause. Patriarchal dominance which presupposes masculine attributes are more valuable has led to the degradation of nature, land and animals, along with the marginalisation of groups including but not limited to women, children and people of colour. Capitalism further propels this oppression as it places value on productivity by any means and subsequently does not value many attributes considered feminine including nature itself. We must replace our culture of domination with an ethic of care. Carolyn Merchant basically says ecofeminism is calling for an ethic of care and an ethic where decisions are made equitably.

The Professor and ecofeminist scholar Heidi Hutner explains to this particular concept, "When we poison the earth, we are poisoned and it all comes from this history of patriarchal domination, where whoever holds the most power has this right to dominate, control and exploit everyone else." All forms of oppression are unacceptable and interconnected. Under ecofeminism, all forms of oppression are not acceptable. For environmentalism to be all-encompassing, it has to consider all people.

Women, people of color and LGBTQ community all face particular issues and when these issues overlap, their effects become compounded. Understanding these connections are necessary for equitable change. So, in order to make real, positive impact in both the cases of environmental degradation and the oppression of marginalized groups, ecofeminism says we have to understand their links to patriarchal society. Feminism must consider ecological concern and vice versa. It is critical that we understand the gender dynamics around climate impacts because we need to have strategies and approaches through adaptation and resilience that respond to those inequities.

The people most affected by environmental destruction must be the ones to lead the movement. As ecofeminists push for an inclusive care ethic, there is also an emphasis on the importance of having diverse leadership at the forefront of the movement. In

particular, the people who are affected by environmental destruction, women, particularly indigenous women and other women of colour, are the ones who are the best equipped to address it and identify the right solutions. Cultural ecofeminism has been criticised by social ecofeminists for making essentialist, universalist and ahistorical claims about both women and nature.

Social eco-feminists claim that there is no essential biological, natural, innate nature of women, no homogeneous woman's experience or woman's ways of knowing and no other historical concept of woman. Rather, women's identities are socially constructed, historically fashioned and materially reinforced through the interplay of a diversity of race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, age, ability, marital status and geographic factors. Analysis of the intersectionality of race and gender operation have been applied in the arena of environmental activism. Ecofeminism has developed as an international movement that includes academic, feminist and activist environmentalist globalists.

This encompasses a variety of approaches to thinking about and acting on behalf of the environment and all eco-feminists recognize the necessary linkage between a healthy ecology and healthy lives. Well, these are certain important books for going through it about ecofeminism. And I'm sure after going through these books, you will learn a lot.

So, the wave of ecofeminism is further extended to environmental racism. The strategy of looking for connections between operations is also evident in eco-feminism, discussion of environmental racism. Two-thirds of all Black and Latinos in the United States actually reside in areas with one or more unregulated toxic waste site, and race is the most significant factor which differentiates between communities with such sites and communities without them. Ecological feminist analysis is helpful in raising questions such as how ethical economic and aesthetic discourses justify racist toxic politics? How does disempowerment and alienation make it particularly difficult for communities to fight back? How racist conceptions of people and cities as unclean and hopeless justify mistreatment? And how in male dominated context woman may be disproportionately affected by toxins?

Further, ecological feminism reminds us that toxic dumping is not only a problem concerning human well-being, but it hugely affects non-humans as well. This particular aspect of ecofeminism is extremely vocal against industrial development or rapid scientific development, which makes adverse impact both nature and women at large.

There is no question of doubt that development goes against natural diversity. It distorts and disturbs the natural balance in manifold of ways. The negative impact equally degrades women. In rural village, women at large maintain household matters. Ecological feminists clearly demonstrated how first world development of third world countries imports problematic and troublesome patriarchal ideas causing innumerable social problems for women in the countries that are being developed. In this regard, we can mention the name of Vandana Shiva who keeps on telling stories, her own point of view on this particular issue quite vividly.

Eco-feminism would certainly stand against mainstream approaches. Mainstream approaches to environmental philosophy can be divided into two basic categories, those that argue for environmental protection based on the instrumental value of the environment and those that seek to extend intrinsic moral value to at least some non-human entities. This third wave of ecofeminism encourages thinking that is contextualist, pluralist, inclusive and holistic. It is contextualist in the sense that it seeks to avoid abstract and universal ethical pronouncement. This process of abstraction can prevent us from recognising the rich diversity within both human and non-human nature. It has simply taken characteristics of the dominant group and turned them into ethical and philosophical ideals.

It can thus reinforce the oppression of women, animals and the rest of the natural world. It is believed that both social ecology and ecofeminism are more specific about the roots of environmental and ecological devastation. In fact, the domination of the natural world is part of more general patterns of domination and control. Therefore, until all patterns of domination are eliminated, we can expect little real progress to be made on the environmental front. Having said this, ecofeminism actually faces serious challenges.

How exactly are we to understand the connections between human domination of other humans and the human domination of non-human nature? Has one really caused the other? Are they mutually reinforcing? Should one have ethical priority? Are they simply parallel developments with little direct connection?

What are the ethical and philosophically preferable strategies of resisting these forms of domination? What exactly are the connections between the domination of women and other forms of social domination? Is ecofeminism a branch of social ecology? Well, with these questions, I stop here because this is the kind of study which needs to go on and on

with a proper critical thinking of the inequality between the nature and human being. Therefore, we need to discuss at large ecology whenever we talk of environmental study.

Thank you very much. Let us meet in the next lecture.