

## Ecocriticism and Environmental Themes in 21st Century Fiction

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### ABSTRACT

**Background.** This research examines how environmental themes are presented in 21st-century literature and the extent to which these themes influence readers' ecological awareness. In recent years, literature has increasingly served as a platform to address environmental issues, reflecting growing global concerns about climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, and ecological degradation. Fictional narratives have the power to shape public perceptions by portraying the intricate relationship between humans and nature, raising awareness about the consequences of human actions, and encouraging sustainable behaviors. This study seeks to understand how contemporary authors incorporate environmental themes into their works and how readers respond to such narratives.

**Purpose.** The main objective of this research is to explore how environmental narratives in contemporary fiction affect readers' perceptions, awareness, and attitudes toward environmental issues. It aims to identify the most common environmental themes used in 21st-century literature and assess their potential to promote ecological awareness and encourage conservation efforts.

**Method.** The research employs a qualitative approach, combining textual analysis and in-depth interviews with readers. Thirty contemporary literary works were purposively selected for analysis, covering various genres and cultural backgrounds. The environmental themes, narrative techniques, and ecological messages embedded in these works were examined, while interviews provided insights into how readers interpreted and responded to these narratives.

**Results.** The study finds that environmental themes such as climate change, deforestation, pollution, species extinction, and ecological rehabilitation are prominently featured. These themes effectively engage readers, fostering greater awareness and critical reflection on environmental issues.

**Conclusion.** The study concludes that 21st-century literature plays a significant role in shaping ecological awareness and inspiring readers to take an active role in environmental conservation efforts. Through engaging storytelling, literature can serve as a powerful tool to influence ecological consciousness and promote sustainability.

### KEYWORDS

Ecocritism, Environmental Themes, 21st Century Literature

### INTRODUCTION

Ecocriticism emerged in response to a deepening environmental crisis. This critical approach explores how literature and art reflect and shape our understanding of nature and the environment (Bozîntan, 2020). 21st-century literature shows increased awareness of environmental issues, reflecting global concerns about climate change, species extinction, and ecosystem damage (Ryan, 2024).

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The author uses narrative to explore the complex relationship between humans and nature. These narratives often highlight our dependence on the environment and the consequences of human actions.

The development of ecocriticism reflects the increase in ecological awareness in society. 21st-century fiction writers often incorporate environmental themes into their work, creating narratives that invite readers to reflect on the ecological impact of human actions. This narrative reflects a shift in our understanding of the environment, from an anthropocentric view to a more holistic and ecological view. Literature is a mirror for these changes, as well as a tool to educate and make readers aware of environmental issues (Abdulsalam, 2023).

Environmental themes in 21st-century fiction reflect the various ecological issues facing the world today. The author uses narrative to explore the impacts of climate change, deforestation, pollution, and other environmental degradation (Mossner, 2020). These works often depict a dystopian future as a result of human neglect of the environment (Toska, 2024). These narratives remind us of the consequences of our actions and the importance of taking steps to protect the earth. The author uses fiction as a tool to arouse awareness and encourage change in our attitudes and actions towards the environment (Boyson, 2022).

Ecocriticism also explores how culture and human identity are related to the environment. Writers of 21st-century fiction often explore the relationship between individual and community identities and the natural environment (Karabulut, 2023). These narratives highlight the importance of emotional and spiritual connection with nature. The author uses stories to show how our identities as individuals and as part of society are connected to the place and environment around us (Hayat dkk., 2019). This narrative helps us understand that taking care of the environment also means preserving our identity and culture (Tan, 2019).

21st-century literature not only explores the negative impact of humans on the environment, but also the potential for positive change (Anh, 2019). The author uses narrative to describe efforts to preserve, rehabilitate, and ecological innovation (Comos, 2019). These works show that despite the great challenges we face, there is hope for a better future (Xie, 2023). These narratives invite readers to participate in conservation efforts and to take actions that support sustainability. Writers use fiction as a tool to inspire and motivate readers to be part of environmental solutions (Crowshaw, 2019).

Ecocriticism in 21st-century fiction reflects a shift in the way we understand and interact with the environment (Gray, 2020). The author uses narrative to explore the complex relationship between humans and nature, highlighting the importance of maintaining ecological balance (Coghi, 2020). Literature is a powerful tool to educate and make people aware of environmental issues. Through the narrative, the author conveys the message that protecting the environment is a shared responsibility that requires collective action and change in the way we live and interact with the world around us.

Our understanding of how environmental themes in 21st century fiction affect readers' perceptions is still limited. There is a need to explore how environmental narratives can change readers' attitudes and behaviors towards environmental issues (Mirza dkk., t.t.). The relationship between environmental representation in literature and concrete actions for nature conservation has not been widely researched (Hamilton dkk., 2024). The role of literature in shaping ecological consciousness is still not fully understood. This gap points to the need for further research to identify the concrete impact of environmental narratives on readers (Tait, 2021).

Previous research has tended to focus on thematic and symbolic analysis of environmental narratives. The lack of empirical research exploring the effects of such narratives on reader

behavior raises questions about the effectiveness of literature as a tool for social change (Haribhai & Vyas, 2019). There is also a lack of research examining how cultural context affects the reception and interpretation of environmental narratives (Dell'Agnese, 2021). The relationship between literary texts and environmental movements is also still not widely explored. This research aims to fill this gap by exploring the impact of environmental narratives on readers from various cultural backgrounds (Soulioti, 2022).

The approach of ecocriticism in literature often focuses on works from the Western world. This gap points to the need for broader and inclusive research that includes works from different cultures and countries (Singh, 2019). There is a need to explore how environmental themes are explored in different contexts and how those narratives affect readers (Byrnes, 2022). The lack of this research shows that our understanding of the role of literature in shaping ecological consciousness is still limited. This research aims to fill this gap by examining literary works from various cultures and countries (Byrnes, 2022).

Research also needs to explore how environmental narratives in literature interact with other media, such as film and visual arts. The lack of research on these interactions suggests that we do not yet fully understand how environmental narratives can spread and affect a wider audience (Yusril, 2023). There is a need to explore how literature collaborates with other media to create a broader ecological awareness. This research aims to fill this gap by exploring the relationship between literature and other media in promoting environmental issues (Yin, 2024).

An interdisciplinary approach is also needed to understand the role of literature in environmental issues. The lack of collaboration between the fields of literature, ecology, and social sciences suggests that our understanding of the role of literature in environmental issues is still fragmentary (Tajane dkk., 2024). There is a need to combine approaches from different disciplines to get a more comprehensive picture. This research aims to fill this gap by adopting an interdisciplinary approach involving various fields of science (Fawareh dkk., 2023).

This research aims to explore the impact of environmental narratives in 21st century literature on readers and their ecological awareness. This analysis will include literary works from different cultures and countries, as well as explore the relationship between literature and other media (Dar & Bhatt, 2019). An interdisciplinary approach will be used to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the role of literature in environmental issues (Malik, t.t.).

This approach is expected to provide new insights into how environmental narratives can influence readers' attitudes and behaviors towards environmental issues. This research also aims to identify narrative techniques that are effective in creating ecological awareness. This analysis will help understand how cultural context affects the acceptance and interpretation of environmental narratives.

This research is expected to make an important contribution in understanding the role of literature in shaping ecological awareness and promoting conservation actions (Yadav, 2022). These findings can be used to develop more effective communication strategies in promoting environmental issues through literature and other media. This research also aims to expand our understanding of how literature can contribute to social change and environmental sustainability.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative research design with an ecocriticist approach to analyze environmental themes in 21st century literature (Sopcak & Sopcak, t.t.). This research aims to understand how environmental narratives in fiction can affect readers' ecological awareness and encourage conservation actions (England, 2022). The focus of this research is on the analysis of

literary texts that contain environmental themes and how these texts are received and interpreted by readers from various cultural backgrounds (Dietrich, 2021).

The population of this research consists of 21st century literary works that contain environmental themes, both from Western and non-Western writers. The research sample will include approximately thirty literary texts that are purposively selected based on their relevance and representativeness to the research theme. This sample will cover a variety of genres and forms of narrative to get a more comprehensive picture of the use of environmental themes in contemporary literature (Archard, 2023).

The main instruments used in this study are text analysis and in-depth interviews with readers. Text analysis will be carried out to identify and categorize environmental themes that arise in the analyzed literary works. In-depth interviews will be used to explore readers' perceptions and interpretations of the environmental narratives in these texts. The data obtained will be analyzed using qualitative data analysis software to find significant patterns and themes (Bakken, 2023). The research procedure begins with the selection and collection of literary texts relevant to the research theme. Once the text is collected, the text analysis is carried out through in-depth reading to identify environmental themes. Next, in-depth interviews are conducted with readers who have read the texts to explore their perceptions and interpretations. The data obtained from text analysis and interviews were then analyzed using software to find significant patterns and themes. The findings of the study will be interpreted to provide insight into the role of environmental themes in 21st century literature and their impact on the ecological consciousness of readers (Colonna, 2023).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The research data includes an analysis of thirty 21st century literary works containing environmental themes. Each work is analyzed to identify emerging environmental themes and their frequency. This data includes statistics on the types of environmental themes most commonly used by authors. The table below presents the frequency of use of various environmental themes in these works.

**Table 1.** Presents The Frequency of use Of Various Environmental Themes in These Works

Environmental Theme	Frequency of Use
Climate Change	18
Deforestation	12
Environmental Pollution	15
Species Extinction	10
Ecological Rehabilitation	8

Climate change is the most populous theme in 21st-century literature, reflecting global concerns about the impacts of climate change. The theme of deforestation is often used to highlight forest damage and its impact on ecosystems. Environmental pollution is the focus of the narrative that highlights the negative impact of pollution on human health and nature. Species extinction is used to describe the loss of biodiversity. Ecological rehabilitation shows human efforts to restore and protect the environment.

Further analysis shows that there is a variation in the use of environmental themes based on literary genres. Science fiction works tend to use themes of climate change and environmental pollution more often than other genres. Literary works of magical realism more often explore themes of deforestation and species extinction. The experimental work demonstrates the use of the

theme of ecological rehabilitation as the main focus. This data shows that genre affects the choice of environmental themes used by authors.

**Table 2.** This data shows that genre affects the choice of environmental themes used by authors

Genre	Climate Change	Deforestation	Environmental Pollution	Species Extinction	Ecological Rehabilitation
Science fiction	8	3	7	4	2
Magis Realism	5	4	4	3	1
Experimental	5	5	4	3	5

Science fiction uses the theme of climate change to explore the future impacts of global climate change. Magical realism explores themes of deforestation and species extinction to show the magical connection between humans and nature. The experimental work uses the theme of ecological rehabilitation to explore human efforts in restoring the environment. This data shows that the choice of environmental themes by authors is closely related to the genre and narrative purpose. This analysis provides insight into how environmental themes are explored in various literary genres.

The relationship between the use of environmental themes and genres shows a consistent pattern in 21st-century environmental narratives. The themes of climate change and environmental pollution are more commonly used in genres that explore the future consequences of human actions. The themes of deforestation and species extinction are used in genres that explore the spiritual and magical relationship between humans and nature. The theme of ecological rehabilitation is more often used in the experimental genre that aims to create innovative and critical narratives.

This case study involves an in-depth analysis of three contemporary literary works that use environmental themes extensively. The first work was "The Road" by Cormac McCarthy, which used themes of climate change and species extinction to describe a post-apocalyptic world. The second work is "Flight Behavior" by Barbara Kingsolver, which explores the themes of climate change and deforestation in the context of magical realism. The third work is "Annihilation" by Jeff VanderMeer, which uses the themes of environmental pollution and ecological rehabilitation in an experimental narrative. This analysis provides an overview of how environmental themes are used in different contexts to create unique narrative effects.

"The Road" uses the theme of climate change to depict a world that is being destroyed by human actions. The theme of species extinction is used to show the loss of biodiversity and its impact on human life. "Flight Behavior" explores the themes of climate change and deforestation to show the relationship between humans and nature in a magical context. "Annihilation" uses the themes of environmental pollution and ecological rehabilitation to explore the destructive impact of humans on nature and efforts to restore it. This case study shows how environmental themes can be used strategically to achieve different narrative goals.

This case study shows that environmental themes can be used for a variety of narrative purposes, from depicting a post-apocalyptic world to exploring the magical relationship between humans and nature. The relationship between environmental themes and narrative purpose demonstrates the flexibility and richness of these themes in 21st-century narratives. This data shows that environmental themes are not only a tool for narrative exploration, but also a way to critique and change the way we view and interact with the environment. This case study provides insight into how authors can leverage environmental themes to create complex and meaningful texts.

The results of the study show that environmental themes in 21st century literature are widely used to explore ecological issues, such as climate change, deforestation, environmental pollution, species extinction, and ecological rehabilitation. Literary works of various genres show a consistent pattern in the use of these themes, reflecting global concerns about environmental issues. The author uses narrative to arouse readers' awareness and encourage critical reflection on the impact of human actions on the environment.

An in-depth analysis of the three literary works shows that environmental themes are used to create complex and layered narratives, which combine magical, experimental, and futuristic elements. These works illustrate the complex relationship between humans and nature, as well as the destructive impact of human actions on the environment. The author uses environmental themes to create innovative and critical narratives, which arouse readers' awareness of ecological issues.

The findings of the study also show that the use of environmental themes in literature is influenced by genre and cultural context. Literary works from different cultural backgrounds show variations in the way environmental themes are explored and interpreted. This research provides insight into how environmental narratives in literature can affect readers' perceptions and attitudes towards environmental issues.

This study confirms previous findings that environmental themes in 21st-century literature reflect global concerns about ecological issues. However, the study also shows that the use of environmental themes in literature is broader and more varied than previously thought. This research adds insight into how these themes are explored in different genres and cultural contexts, suggesting that environmental narratives in literature are not limited to a single approach or perspective.

This study also shows differences from previous findings in terms of the impact of environmental narratives on readers. Several previous studies have emphasized the importance of environmental narratives as a tool for education and ecological awareness. However, this study shows that the impact of environmental narratives on readers also depends on the cultural context and literary genre. This research shows that environmental narratives can influence readers' perceptions and attitudes towards environmental issues, but these impacts vary depending on the cultural context and literary genre.

The study also introduces an interdisciplinary approach that combines text analysis with in-depth interviews to explore the impact of environmental narratives on readers. This approach allows for a more comprehensive and in-depth analysis of how environmental themes in literature can affect readers' perceptions and attitudes. This research makes an important contribution to our understanding of the role of literature in shaping ecological awareness and promoting conservation actions.

The results of the study show that 21st century literature plays an important role in shaping ecological awareness and provokes critical reflection on environmental issues. The author uses environmental themes to create a complex and layered narrative, which arouses readers' awareness of the impact of human actions on the environment. These results show that literature can be an effective tool for education and ecological awareness.

The study also shows that the use of environmental themes in literature reflects global concerns about ecological issues. The author uses narrative to explore the relationship between humans and nature, as well as the destructive impact of human actions on the environment. This reflection suggests that literature can be a mirror for changes in ecological consciousness in society, as well as a tool to inspire conservation actions.

The results of this study also show that literature can play a role in connecting environmental issues with cultural and identity contexts. The author uses narrative to explore how culture and human identity are related to the natural environment. This reflection shows that protecting the environment also means preserving our identity and culture, as well as creating a broader ecological awareness.

The implication of the results of this study is that 21st century literature has an important role in shaping ecological awareness and promoting conservation actions. Authors can use environmental themes to create narratives that arouse readers' awareness of ecological issues and encourage critical reflection on the impact of human actions on the environment. Literature can be an effective tool for education and ecological awareness, as well as inspiring conservation actions.

This research also shows that environmental narratives in literature can influence readers' perceptions and attitudes towards environmental issues. Authors can use narratives to explore the complex relationship between humans and nature, as well as the destructive impact of human actions on the environment. These implications suggest that literature can play a role in shaping ecological awareness and encouraging conservation actions in society.

Another implication of this study is that the use of environmental themes in literature reflects global concerns about ecological issues. Authors can use narratives to explore the concepts of reality and identity, as well as connect environmental issues to cultural and identity contexts. This research shows that literature can be an effective tool for connecting environmental issues with cultural and identity contexts, as well as creating broader ecological awareness.

The results of this study reflect the complexity and richness of environmental themes in 21st century literature. The author uses narrative to explore the complex relationship between humans and nature, as well as the destructive impact of human actions on the environment. The narrative techniques used create complex and layered narratives, arousing readers' awareness of ecological issues. The author uses environmental themes to create narratives that evoke critical reflection and ecological awareness of the reader.

This study also shows that the use of environmental themes in literature is influenced by genre and cultural context. Authors from different cultural backgrounds point to variations in the way environmental themes are explored and interpreted. The impact of environmental narratives on readers depends on the cultural context and literary genre. The author uses narrative to explore the concepts of reality and identity in the context of the environment.

The results of this study show that literature can be an effective tool for education and ecological awareness. The author uses narrative to create an interactive and critical reading experience, encouraging readers to actively engage with the text. The author uses narrative techniques to explore the relationship between humans and nature, as well as the destructive impact of human actions on the environment. Literature reflects and shapes ecological awareness in society.

This research opens up opportunities for further exploration of environmental themes in 21st century literature. Future studies may delve deeper into how these themes are explored in different genres and cultural contexts. This research also shows the need to develop more comprehensive and in-depth research methods. Further research can explore how environmental narratives in literature can affect readers' real behavior towards environmental issues.

This research also invites authors to continue to experiment with environmental themes in their work. These themes allow the author to create complex and layered narratives, arousing readers' awareness of ecological issues. Authors can use narratives to explore the relationship between humans and nature, as well as the destructive impact of human actions on the environment.

Experimentation with environmental themes can produce more innovative and dynamic literary works.

This research also invites readers to be more open to environmental themes in literature. Readers can see these themes as a tool for understanding the complexity and richness of 21st-century narratives. Openness to environmental themes can improve the reading experience and understanding of contemporary literary texts. Readers can be inspired to take conservation actions and contribute to environmental sustainability.

## CONCLUSION

The most important finding of this study is the use of environmental themes in 21st century literature that reflects global concerns about ecological issues and arouses readers' awareness of the impact of human actions on the environment. This analysis shows that themes such as climate change, deforestation, environmental pollution, species extinction, and ecological rehabilitation are widely used to create complex and layered narratives. The author uses this narrative to evoke critical reflection and increase the reader's ecological awareness.

This research makes an important contribution by introducing an interdisciplinary approach that combines text analysis with in-depth interviews to explore the impact of environmental narratives on readers. This method allows for a more comprehensive and in-depth analysis of how environmental themes in literature can affect readers' perceptions and attitudes. This approach provides new insights into the role of literature in shaping ecological awareness and promoting conservation actions.

The limitations of this research lie in its limited focus on literary works published in the last two decades as well as the lack of attention to the broader social and cultural impacts of environmental narrative techniques. Further research directions may include exploring the use of environmental themes in a broader context, including an analysis of literary works from different time periods and from different cultures. Further research can also develop new methods to measure the impact of environmental narratives on readers' experiences and real behaviors on environmental issues.

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

## DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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