

Interdependence of Literature and Environment: An Analysis of *What I Learned from the Trees* by L. E. Bowman

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Abstract:

Literature and the environment are interconnected. Literature has always depicted Mother Nature. Since the beginning of literature, the study and analysis of nature have always been a prominent part of it. Since the dawn of civilization literature has always been an active medium for depicting the harsh realities of society and environment. From ancient to modern times literature and nature has been hand in hand. We always call nature as Mother Nature. This nature is connected with the activities of humans. The issues of climate change and various feminist movements have drawn parallels between nature and women. Both are an integral part of human civilization. All humans must make a balance between human activities and nature. The paper draws parallels between literature and nature in light of the poetry collection *What I Learned from the Trees* by L. E. Bowman published in 2021, which delves into the intricate relationship between humans and nature and how these often overlooked, everyday interactions affect us as individuals, families, and communities. These linkages include our language and literature, mythology, and ancient faiths. There are instances where women and nature are comparable, particularly when it comes to their roles as producers and maintainers of life as well as their interpersonal relationships. This paper is an attempt to review the relationship between literature and nature to bring a positive change in the world.

Keywords: ecofeminism, ecologism, environment, interdependence, literature, psychology

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Introduction:

Lauren E. Bowman was born in North Florida, USA, and is a 34-year-old writer. Bowman writes about her relationship, self-acceptance, and self-love difficulties. Through her writings, she tries to inspire others to discover a place of introspection, empowerment, and acceptance as well as to learn from and overcome their own challenges and uncertainties. The collection of short stories *What I Learned From The Trees* was published in 2021. It is a collection of short poems that talk about the relationship between the narrator and nature. The narrator finds solace in the lap of nature. The narrator talks about how humans destroy nature for their own needs and greed. The writer draws a relationship between the narrator (female) and nature.

The social movements that included feminism, ecologism, and women's spirituality gave rise to ecofeminism. For centuries there has been a close relation between women and nature. Both have the capability to produce new generations. Both can produce new generations. Both are affectionate and can heal the wounds of mankind. But humans have been greedy, and for their greediness both Mother Nature and women paid heavily.

Ecofeminism as a cultural movement has started very early. The gap between men and women and between humans and the natural world has grown as a result of capitalism. Early men believed that he owned the land and that a woman's body. They are his commodities, and can use them as per his own will. The supremacy of men's civilization over nature is also made possible by men's power and influence over women. Men are always going to appreciate nature and women for what they can get out of it. For them, pleasure and profit are associated with nature and women. The purpose of ecofeminism is to expose the hidden agendas of the capitalist, imperialist, and patriarchal coalitions, as well as how they exploit women and the environment and the consequences that follow.

Aims and Objectives: The main objectives of the research are as follows:

- 1) To explore the relationship between Nature and Literature.
- 2) To establish familiarity with environmental education.
- 3) To explore social and environmental awareness and to safeguard both of them
- 4) To explore literature holds up a mirror to society.

Theoretical framework: This paper explores the role that literature plays in the conservation of nature and human beings. It talks about how literature has been a mirror to society to point out its positive as well as negative sides to the world. Literature has always played its part by depicting the reality of real life through real life.

Review of Literature:

Adabpal (2019) states that nature plays a major role in literature, particularly in the Romantic period.

Alonso and Cabarcos (2019) stated that ecocriticism is thus transdisciplinary and multifaceted in scope, including political discourses and philosophical theories to foster a critical approach towards environmental justice.

Al Fawareh et al. (2023) say that present-day ecocriticism is, in fact, a very recent revisionist and reformist movement that has taken center stage in the ecological perspective of contemporary English literature around the globe. Eco-criticism's ecological perspective draws boundaries between the human-nature partnership in ways that are both beneficial and harmful.

Karunya, (2023). Contemporary feminist writing discusses a wide range of political, social, psychological, and ecological circumstances, representing a multitude of experiences that influence women's creative environments.

Akhter (2021) explains that "Literature has been an imitator of life for generations on this earth; this literature has voiced the voiceless. Recent contemporary and postmodern literary theories have catered to burgeoning notions of logic that go beyond human survival on the planet". (p.235)

Baghirov (2024) explains the concept of modern education for the betterment of nature and society. He explains that based on our experience, the best approach to implementing an integrated teaching strategy is through a project-based strategy. It will enable us to accomplish our primary goal, which is to teach students who can instantly contribute to a constructive and forward-thinking development of society that teaches how to live sustainably with its nature.

Bump (2021) explains that, in actuality, the twenty-first century offers a plethora of more intriguing options for novel forms of producing and reading literature. But nothing could be more inspiring or fulfilling than actively taking part in the fight to preserve mankind, our future generations, and all other living things on Earth.

Idrus and Iyad (2021) pointed out that people didn't start figuring out what literature might teach us about the dangers nature faces and our connection to it until the late 20th century.

Akhter, (2023) talks about the role of literature in predicting nature as:

"Literature has always been a mirror to society. Since ancient times, literature has performed two functions. To some, it is art for the sake of art, while to others; it is a reflection of modern society. These two ideas are always at the foundation of great literature. The planet (Earth) has suffered much as a result of global ecological catastrophe, mostly as a result of human atrocities against nature. As a result, literature cannot turn its back on this". (p. 189)

Wahhab et. al. (2023) in their paper explained that several societal issues, including unemployment, poverty, education, and religious views, can have an impact on domestic violence. These elements influence the social milieu that gives rise to domestic violence.

Kaya (2021) states that:

"Having a strong understanding of ethical responsibility to our fragile planet, environmental literature confronts these challenges and promises to raise local and global awareness. It seems that establishing an awareness around processes that concern eco-systemic issues and relationships through writing or literature is one of the major characteristics of ecocriticism which has brought an influential dimension to literary and cultural studies". (p. 31).

Rebecca and Sargunam (2020) point out important categories as three categories of literary writings—informational literature, environmental literature, and digital literature—can be used to group all of the literature produced in the twenty-first century.

Nahdhiyah et al. (2023) explore that for many ages, the relationship between humans and nature has been a source of dispute. Nature has started to exhibit serious signs of stress as a result of degenerative methods of thinking or mechanically progressing attitudes of people towards nature, which is considered a passive receptacle.

Akhter (2024) revealed that literature has served as an active medium to represent the society and its relationship with it.

Dasi, (2018) explains that the intentional or unconscious destruction of nature's aspects, which are essential to distinguishing persons within certain cultural and geographic contexts, has resulted from humanity's quest for a desirable living.

Kumar and Singh (2021), most writers have done a fantastic job of capturing the close relationship that exists between literature and nature. Ecology, eco-criticism, and environmentalism are all significant ideas in the modern world. Numerous literary works appear to have taken nature seriously, and the primary driver of environmental degradation has been globalisation.

Jumiati et al. (2020) environmental problems are no longer the exclusive domain of a single scientific discipline; cooperation across several scientific fields will yield several solutions to protect and maintain the environment, which is inextricably linked to human existence.

Analysis:

Born and bred among the sweeping oaks and marshes of north Florida, USA, Lauren writes in *What I Learned from the Trees*- complex relationship between humans and nature. It explores the interrelationship between people and the natural world and how these relations have an impact on the life of an individual and particularly on a community. This collection of poems bears significant relevance to contemporary society and the challenges we confront regarding the increasing disconnection between humans and the natural world. The dualistic way of life is the cause of every problem that individuals face in their lives, whether it is personal, environmental, or economic. People who are selfish and greedy are cut off from both nature and humanity.

The majority of the poems assert that there was a direct connection between men's slavery of women and man's control over nature in various ways. We can comprehend the disparity and subordination because of the way the world views nature.

A child finds nature to be both amazing and terrible. As we become older, the bad parts of life seep into our joyful recollections, eclipsing happy times with paler edges of fear. Before long, our fear of breaking causes us to forget how frequently nature repairs itself. We also fail to recognize that we are a part of nature and that things are always breaking and rebuilding. According to Bowman's logic, this mature perspective on the world sends us on a hopeless quest to end a feeling of broken loneliness.

The narrator explains that most humans treat themselves as superior. They think that other living beings are of no importance. The narrator wants to make them realize that we are all equal.

It is only possible when we have the feeling of togetherness and equality. The narrator explains it as:

You cannot truly see something
if you believe you are above it.

Emotions. People. Creatures.

The earth. (Bowman, *Human doesn't mean Humane*)

The narrator compares herself with that of the environment. She finds herself in every piece of nature.

I want to be so wrecked by this world
that there are little pieces of me everywhere.

In the trees I climbed as a child.

In the blades of grass that bunch at my feet. (Bowman, *Stars*)

The narrator keeps on comparing herself to that of nature and her feelings. Just like waves are disturbing the silence of the sea in the same way, her partner is disturbing her peace by dragging, shaking, and clenching her emotions and feelings. She compares it in the following lines:

I'm just an island, and the waves are pulling you in.

I can feel it in your hands more than anything.

Clenched.

Shaking.

Frightened. (Bowman, *We were both water, but you were ice, and I was the sea*)

The narrator keeps on explaining the relationship between humans and nature in many ways. She explains how we all belong to nature. We have our origin from nature and will go back to nature. She states that:

We were all born with the instinct.

The ability to hear the trees;
to taste the wind.

Our feet so covered in earth,

it looked like we sprang from it. (Bowman, *Muzzles and Razor Blades*)

Nature has the healing power. It heals all our wounds- social and emotional. Nature has the power to bliss its creatures, to give us company when we feel alone. The narrator explains the same as:

When I feel alone, I go outside.

I watch the leaves, and the grass,
and how carefully the grasshopper cleans its wings.

I listen to the hummingbirds fighting over nectar; (Bowman, *It isn't all lost, it just isn't all found*)

The writer compares two boys – one rich and one poor. She expresses her feelings and pain upon the condition of the boys. One boy suffers because of poverty and the other is spoiled because of wealth. The narrator explains that how people destroy nature and other living creatures and justify their ways in a logical way. Humans are greedy and find themselves of the authority over all other living creatures. She explains:

A group of screaming women
 beat a snake to death today.
 There were children around;
 it had to be done, they explain.
 Even with its head bashed and bleeding,
 I can tell it wasn't poisonous or threatening,
 but when they hear this, they just scoff and roll their eyes.
 It's better to be safe.
 But that's how we function as humans, isn't it?
 Ignorant, and terrified because of it.
 So unsure of the world, and the creatures living in it; (Bowman, *How do you view the world with eyes fully open?*)

This anthology is devoted to societal and ecological change by delving into the narrator's innermost thoughts and emotions. According to the narrator, transformation can only occur when one's perspective on life is altered. Humans never give other creatures a warm or kind glance. It confines individuals to an assortment of items that may be utilised to fulfil their self-serving desires. We as humans must help one another and other living things if they genuinely wish to ensure that all living things live in peace and without violence.

This type of literature exposes the wrong decisions concerning the development of human society, in particular, those unsustainable industrial and technological developments and their mistreatment of the land and its people. They note that humans are on the brink of extinction and need to do something to avoid degradation before it is too late.

Conclusion:

The narrator feels happy and solace in nature. She compares herself to nature and finds a resemblance between her inner self and Mother Nature. All the poems give us a way where we find that how humans depend on nature and any disparity or destruction to nature has a direct impact on human life. We notice that the speaker sets out on an existential quest and goes back into the woods and nature to find solace both physically and metaphorically. It is there that she comes to the realization that humans are from nature and have to go back to nature but unfortunately we didn't realise its importance. We as humans are just after over-greedy needs and don't bother about other living beings. These poems demonstrate the inherent connectivity of people through the variety of voices they employ. In a process of shattering and then healing, the speaker accepts nature. The writer explores it clearly and vividly that we cannot escape the influence of nature in our lives. The nature teaches us many lessons of life. It may teach us to help us begin the process of healing some of our deepest traumas. The speaker aspires to establish a civilization that actively seeks to enhance the environment. The writer wants to establish a new mind-set that prioritises individuals and quality of life is necessary for the future. The poems promote a community where humans should live in harmony with other creatures without being greedy. Only then will this planet be a better place to live. So, it is everyone's right to exist and enjoy life. Animals and plants both have a right to exist and live a life of peace and harmony.

About the Author

Tawhida Akhter is working as an Assistant Professor (English) at Shaqra University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. She has completed her education from India. She has ten years of teaching experience. She has published many books, research papers, and review articles with reputed publishers and journals. Her research interests include science fiction, cultural studies, diaspora fiction, humanity and technology in literature, Nano-technology and literature, and dystopian fiction. ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4149-4855>

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