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Term Paper

Ecocriticism and the representation of nature in contemporary US literature

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INTRODUCTION

The ongoing environmental issues emerged into the whole new field of study based on the examination of nature in literature, known as ecocriticism. This discipline researches the influence the literary works have on human's relationship with nature, its positive and negative representations of the natural world. Ecocriticism's primary objective is to raise people's ecological awareness and prevent future environmental crisis. This term paper aims to delve into the formation of ecocriticism as a literary theory, its development, and fundamental concepts of ecocriticism, with a particular emphasis on its representation in contemporary American literature.

The relevance of this work lies in its independent in-depth analysis of the interplay between literature and environmental consciousness, providing the reader with insight into how literature represents and influences modern society's perceptions and attitudes toward environmental issues.

The novelty of the research is in its multi-faceted approach, with a focus on the literary theory, environmental studies, cultural and historical background, as well as its contemporary significance. The other significant point of the paper is the discovery of ecocriticism's aspects and theories through Ursula K. Le Guin's "The Word for World is Forest."

The object of research is ecocriticism as a literary theory and the representation of nature in American literature.

The primary subjects of this study are the conceptual frameworks, texts, and literary movements that deal with ecocriticism.

The purpose of the research is to comprehensively reveal this topic through the detailed analysis of relevant English-language materials. Moreover, the other aim is to improve our knowledge of people's relationship with nature and its portrayal in literature.

The aim of this study is to provide a comprehensive overview of ecocriticism as a literary theory, its historical development, and its relevance in contemporary discourse. By analysing the representation of nature in American literature, the study aims to illuminate the complex interplay between literature, society, and the environment.

The tasks of the term paper are:

- To explore the historical background and emergence of ecocriticism as a literary theory.
- To explore the major concepts and trends in the representation of nature in American literature.
- To examine the three periods of evolution of ecocriticism and their main features.
- To delve into the intersection of violence and ecological devastation in Ursula K. Le Guin's 'The Word for World is Forest,' exploring its ecocritical understanding and cultural significance.
- To consider the symbolism and metaphorical imagery of nature in 'The Word for World is Forest,' and to emphasize their centrality in the narrative and their broader ecological implications.

Methods of research are generalization, analysis and synthesis, descriptive and comparative approaches.

Structurally the term paper consists of an introduction, two chapters, summaries and the list of literature. The work contains 32 pages, 22 of which are the main text.

CHAPTER I. ECOCRITICISM AS A LITERARY THEORY: HISTORY OF DEVELOPMENT AND REPRESENTATIONS OF NATURE IN AMERICAN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

1.1 Origins and development of ecocriticism as a literary theory

Nature constantly appears in the literary works of authors all around the world. From the Shakespeare's sonnets, and Emily Brontë's "Wuthering heights", to the literary compositions of the contemporary writers. However, the perspective of modern authors has been quite shifted. Nowadays, environmental crisis is of the ultimate importance and possesses a key place in the themes of modern fiction. As in the famous young adult fiction story, there was a phrase: "There's one thing you can say for air pollution, you get utterly amazing sunrises". (Gaiman, N., & Pratchett, T. 2014: 104) Meaning that nature is marvellous, but people are destructive.

Ecocriticism occurred in the second half of the 20th century and from that time has been constantly developing.

According to Environmental Humanities Initiative, environmental criticism, also known as ecocriticism and "green" criticism, "is a rapidly emerging field of literary study that considers the relationship that human beings have to the environment." (EHI, [What is ecocriticism?](#))

Ecocriticism was most known starting from the 1990s, however, its first mentions and forms may be traced back deeper in the past. Due to the arising public recognition of the environmental problems in the sixties and seventies, ecocriticism started to take shape as a separate study. The first mentions of global warming and

pollution led to higher public awareness of human's destructive influence on Earth.

This influence was closely connected to the technological advancement, which was at first positive experience. However, in 1962 in the USA a work named "Silent Spring" dared to declare the opposite.

"The scenario of a new technology, mishandled by the experts who developed it, accidentally unleashing a battery of unprecedented "terrors" upon the land (or, in this case, the sea) has replayed itself a hundred times over in the American imagination (and the American media), perhaps most memorably in Rachel Carson's vivid introduction to her 1962 bestseller *Silent Spring*—a text which is often credited with catalyzing the modern environmental movement. In the shocking "Fable for Tomorrow" that opens *Silent Spring*, Carson conjures a tranquil town "in the heart of America" that suddenly and mysteriously begins to wither away, struck, as we later learn, by creeping tides of the highly toxic pesticides developed and widely deployed in the postwar period." (Hagood, 2010: 3-4)

Thus, in her masterpiece, Carson asked a rhetorical question: "...why should we tolerate a diet of weak poisons, a home in insipid surroundings, a circle of acquaintances who are not quite our enemies, the noise of motors with just enough relief to prevent insanity? Who would want to live in a world which is just not quite fatal?" (Carson, 1962: 12)

It is claimed to be the beginning of an awareness period, which has later led to the appearing of the Wilderness Act of 1964, the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts and Earth Day, first celebrated in 1970. It was also the year of the Environmental Protection

Agency (EPA) establishment, aimed to reinforce and structuralize ecological matters at the national level.

Moreover, “environmental issues, in turn, have become an increasing provocation both for artists and for academics, giving rise within colleges and universities to cross-disciplinary environmental studies programs often galvanized by student demand as much as by faculty research agendas.” (Buell, 2005: 5)

In general, the concept of ecocriticism, initially referred to as “literary ecology” first occurred in the work of Meeker in 1972 in his “The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology” and was later modified in 1996 by Rueckert in his book, “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in ecocriticism”, where he states: “Specifically, I am going to experiment with the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature, because ecology (as a science, as a discipline, as the basis for a human vision) has the greatest relevance to the present and future of the world we all live in of anything that I have studied in recent years”. (Rueckert, 1978: 107)

A major event for ecocriticism as a prevailing literary and cultural theory happened in 1992 with the establishment of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE). Cherry Glotfelty mentioned it in his reply to Michelle Balaev: “Then, at the 1992 WLA conference in Reno, we organized a meeting to discuss establishing a new group related to literature and environment studies. Gosh, there were about fifty scholars who showed up. I remember it was at the Sands Casino in downtown Reno, and we could hear the slot machines in the background. This would be the first organizational meeting for our new group, ASLE, the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment. Scott

Slovic was chosen as the first president”. (BALAEV, M., & Glotfelty, 2012: 612-613)

1.2 Three waves of ecocriticism

The development of ecocriticism is characterized by three main periods. These were defined by Cheryll Glotfelty in “A Guided Tour of ecocriticism, with Excursions to Catherland”. However, “the adoption of the wave metaphor to describe the development of ecocriticism occurred in Lawrence Buell’s “The Future of Environmental Criticism”, although he did not actually offer a detailed breakdown of the specific emphases of each wave when he identified a first and second wave”. (Slovic, 2010: 5) Even though he later refused to limit the periods of ecocriticism in waves, and even apologised for such a restrictive metaphor, the idea was already presented and publicly acknowledged.

“Until a few years ago, as a decent approximation one might characterize ecocriticism as a two-stage affair since its inception as a self-conscious movement in the early 1990s. What follows is an updated version of an earlier attempt to do so that seems to have gained fairly wide if not universal acceptance”. (Buell, 2011: 88)

The first wave of ecocriticism emerged in the 1990s and was principally concerned with the representation of nature in literature.

Scholars back then examined how authors from diverse periods and cultures depicted the natural world and its significance in human life. Its representatives were “first-stage critics privileged figures like British romantic poet John Clare, Henry David Thoreau, and John Muir” (Buell, 2011: 95)

On the contrary, second-wave ecocriticism broadens its focus from texts about wilderness and beauty nature, to the diverse ecological perspectives on the works with some pressing topics such as urban, regional, ethnic, feminist, and postcolonial literature. It disapproves of the artificial opposition between rural and urban landscapes, observing works on urban landscapes as equally fruitful material for ecological analysis.

The second wave ecocriticism was deeper and more sophisticated, as it “affiliated itself more closely with the other main historical strand of environmentalist thinking: public health environmentalism, whose geographic gaze was directed more at landscapes of urban... And whose environmental ethics and politics were socio-centric rather than ecocentric.” (Buell, 2011: 94)

The development of third-wave ecocriticism, first identified in 2009 but embedded in post-2000, continues to be relevant today.

Scott Slovic defined the main features of the third wave, which are: “global concepts of place are being explored in fruitful tension with neo-bioregionalist attachments to specific locales, producing such neologisms as “cosmopolitanism, “rooted cosmopolitanism,” “the global soul,” and “translocality” and many others, such as “feminism” and “animality”. (Slovic, 2010: 7)

While the first wave mostly considered urban environments unimportant, and the second wave took them into account, the third wave zeroes in on urban environmental development. This shift allows ecocritics to touch upon issues like racism, poverty, and gender bias, while also addressing environmental concerns and promoting an ecojustice and social justice approach. It finally blurred the invisible line between “human” and “nature”, and emerged those as an entity.

1.3 Major themes and trends in the representation of nature in American literature

“Nature — just like a painting, sculpture, or building — only becomes meaningful when we make an active connection with it. Like a canvas in a gallery, a landscape comes to life in the eyes of the people who look at it. The act of observation brings pleasure and enrichment, and sometimes poses questions. In return, the observer confers meaning on the works of nature and artists and the hybrid forms produced through human action on the environment, and transmits that meaning to others.” (Schwimmer, 2000: 3)

One of the earliest and most enduring themes in the representation of nature is the sublime. Edmund Burke studied the idea of sublime, and he defined terror, greatness, astonishment, passion and many other phenomena as those that bring it up. Therefore, he wrote: “Whatever is fitted in any fort to excite* the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analagous to terror, is a fource of the sublime ; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling”. (Burke, 1757: 13)

In his novel “Moby-Dick”, Melville describes the power of the ocean in vivid detail, writing, “Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately

stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people's hats off — then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can.” (Melville, 1922: 1)

The reflection of human psyche by nature was another idea explored by writers, especially during the period of American Romanticism. Its representatives were inclined “to use Nature as a motif to express the newborn feelings showing positive attitude towards new government and more diversities”. (Wu: 3)

For instance, Ralph Waldo Emerson in his essay “Nature” (1836), claims that rather than just the beautiful landscapes, nature is the source of inspiration, wisdom, and peace.

“Yet it is certain that the power to produce this delight, does not reside in nature, but in man, or in a harmony of both. It is necessary to use these pleasures with great temperance. For, nature is not always tricked in holiday attire, but the same scene which yesterday breathed perfume and glittered as for the frolic of the nymphs, is overspread with melancholy today. Nature always wears the colours of the spirit.” (Emerson, 1836: 9)

Thus, Emerson delved into the idea of humans’ perception of nature as the reason for why it evokes such great emotions. It resonates with people’s feelings and experience, reflects the state of human’s spirit and finds its response.

However, due to the technological progress and popularization of urban landscapes over natural ones, people in the 20th century gradually disconnected from the land. For instance, in the 1930s, after the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl devastated large parts of the United States, John Steinbeck's novel “The Grapes of Wrath” voiced the terrible consequences of urbanization brought to Earth. Steinbeck writes, “The tractors came over the roads and into the

fields, great crawlers moving like insects, having the incredible strength of insects ... Snub-nosed monsters, raising the dust and sticking their snouts into it, straight down the country, across the country, through fences, through dooryards, in and out of gullies in straight lines. They did not run on the ground, but on their own roadbeds. They ignored hills and gulches, water courses, fences, houses..." (Steinbeck, 1939: 47)

This image of the tractors ripping through the soil symbolizes all the destruction caused by humans, their greed, and lack of ecological awareness. People appreciated all the power and possibilities the technologies gave them, but lost the feeling of wholeness with natural world, only abusing its resources.

However, contemporary American literature should not be restricted to only describing the enforcement and devastation of nature, but also its celebration. The recently published novel "Circe" by Madeline Miller explores peace, interconnectivity, and love to nature.

A goddess Circe was forced to go to an island where all she has is plants and animals. Through this character, the author depicts the forgotten feeling of entity with nature. "The oak that creaked over my head I had known as a sapling. The beach ebbed and flowed, its curves changing with every winter season. Even the cliffs were different, carved by the rain and wind, by the claws of countless scabbling lizards, by the seeds that stuck and sprouted in their cracks. Everything was united by the steady rise and fall of nature's breath." (Miller, 2018: 120)

The revolutionary book written by Rachel Carson, mentioned previously, was a demanding and life-changing piece of work which was not absolutely positively perceived at first. "Reviewer after

reviewer-in all genre of periodicals-damned Carson's meddling in “progress,” condemned her for proposing “unrealistic” alternatives” (Smith, 2001: 739), at the same time commenting on Carson's character and personal life.

Some chastised her way of life, some called her a communist: “Her New Yorker pieces drew overwhelming praise from readers, but a vocal minority objected to her and her findings strenuously. One writer wrote: “Miss Rachel Carson's reference to the selfishness of insecticide manufacturers probably reflects her Communist sympathies, like a lot of our writers these days. We can live without birds and animals, but, as the current market slump shows, we cannot live without business. As for insects, isn't it just like a woman to be scared to death of a few little bugs! As long as we have the H-bomb everything will be O.K.” (Smith, 2001: 740)

Even though many despised her work, “the threats Carson outlined were too frightening to ignore. Silent Spring brought a new public awareness that nature was vulnerable to human intervention.” ([“Wayback machine”](#) 2005)

CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER I

The development of ecocriticism as a literary theory arose due to the higher environmental awareness of the mid-20th century. Rachel Carson's pioneer work, "Silent Spring," published in 1962, exposed the harmful effects of pesticides and paved the way for the modern environmental movement. Ecocriticism began to take shape in the 1990s, with researchers investigating the relationship between human beings and the environment in literature.

Ecocriticism has progressed through three waves. The first wave was focused on the analysis of how nature is depicted in literary works. The second wave expanded its focus to ecological, feminist, and ethnic concerns and was characterized by many other features that make it different from the previous period. The third wave has been continuously developing since the post-2000 era and keeps its emphasis on ecological problems created by humankind.

From more romanticised representations of nature in American literature, such as the sublime and the nature as a reflection of the human psyche, there was a drastic turn into the environmental sustainability and the urgent need to protect the planet.

CHAPTER II. THE ANALYSIS OF ECOCRITICAL ELEMENTS IN “THE WORD FOR WORLD IS FOREST” BY URSULA K. LE GUIN

2.1 The interplay of violence and ecological degradation in Ursula K. Le Guin's “The Word for World is Forest”

Ursula K. Le Guin (1929–2018) was an American writer known for her science fiction and fantasy works, but she was also a significant figure in the ecofeminist movement. In many of her novels, Le Guin creates societies which respect and co-exist with nature, frequently contrasting it with the present-day humanity. In her works, one may trace the elements of ecojustice and ecofeminism.

The term ‘ecojustice’ appeared in 1980 as an American movement manifesting: “the just treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of income, race, color, national origin, Tribal affiliation, or disability, in agency decision-making and other Federal activities that affect human health.” As well as these people’s rights for “equitable access to a healthy, sustainable, and resilient” environment, protection against waste, pollution, and “environmental effects (including risks) and hazards, including those related to climate change, the cumulative impacts of environmental and other burdens, and the legacy of racism or other structural or systemic barriers.” (EPA, <http://www.epa.gov>)

Sometimes the term is applied to economics, and that’s wrong, as “eco” obviously stands for “ecological”. However, it is not strictly enforceable to promote ethical behaviour for the

environment, that is: “fair and caring treatment of natural systems and nonhuman creatures”. On the contrary, it refers to: "ecological wholeness and economic and social justice.” (Gibson, 2004: 21) Therefore, it is relevant for humans as well.

Ursula K. Le Guin's novel “The Word for World is Forest” explores the concept of ecojustice in a hypothetical future where the human race has established colonies on other planets.

“Initially written as a reaction to Vietnam War, this science fiction novel can also be considered as an environmental one as it criticizes humans’ approach to nature by comparing them to indigenous people from another world.” (Ateş, 2017: 1)

The work itself is the perfect example of the frightful combination of violation of human rights due to race and simultaneously the devastation of land.

“The Word for World is Forest sensitively deals with political and ecological Issues; yet the novella transcends the contemporary to become a kind of moral parable.” (Siciliano, 1975: 18)

The space-exploring story, with the elements of action by Le Guin, takes place on Athshe, a richly wooded world inhabited by non-violent indigenous tribes known as the Athsheans. In the novel, the human settlers, led by Captain Davidson, exploit the planet's natural wealth and impose slavery on the Athsheans to work in their logging colonies.

Le Guin points out a distinct contrast between the Athsheans' harmonious coexistence with their environment and the humans' ruinous exploitative use of nature. This treatment can be understood based on Captain Davidson’s perspective, which is: «You worry about deer and trees and fibreweed, fine, that’s your thing. But I like to see things in perspective, from the top down, and the top, so far, is

humans. We're here now; and so this world's going to go our way.»
(Le Guin. 1972: 9)

He is not concerned with the devastation that the forest is suffering and all the murders and destructions that he's in charge of. The humans selfishly came to another planet and began to subjugate it, demonstrating the domination and superiority they tend to have. It creates a natural catastrophe, as many natural habitats are destroyed and along with them - fauna and flora on that land.

Moreover, through the character of Selver, the leader of the Athshean's opposition, Le Guin argues that the violence wrought upon the land is inextricably connected to the violence inflicted upon its inhabitants. The Athsheans were a race who never knew violence before, they used to sing to show their status and strength, but humans demonstrated them what is cruelty, slaying, devastation. Having no other choice but to respond, the Athsheans ended up resorting to violence themselves: "You killed the women—the women—you burned them alive, slaughtered them like animals!" "Should we have let them live?" said Selver with vehemence equal to Gosse's, but softly, his voice singing a little." (Le Guin. 1972: 56)

Even though the invasion was unsuccessful, and the land was returned to the Athsheans, they could never truly be the same again. It is quite clear when one considers those violent killings happening in between the inhabitants of the Athsheans and the final words of Selver: "Maybe after I die, people will be as they were before I was born, and before you came. But I do not think they will." (Le Guin. 1972: 74)

Therefore, "like Pandora's box, things do not go "back to normal" once the killing story has been released. The novella is grounded on the notion of resistance, motivated by a perception that

enough harm had been done already, and that allowing depredation and slavery to go on any further would lead the planet and its inhabitants to a path of no return, mirroring the Earth that has encouraged Terrans on this sort of violent mission in the first place. *Forest* is a story of re-appropriation, of refusing to go down a certain path in the knowledge that it will be incompatible with life as Athsheans know and want it. It is also, as aforementioned, a novella in which the Earth echoes some of our fears as to what might happen to it if we continue to conduct things in the business-as-usual mode.” (Savi, 2021: 549)

2.2 Symbolism and metaphorical representations of nature in “The Word for World Is Forest”

The planet Athshe, covered in massive forests, represents an idyllic and harmonious world unaltered by humans. The symbolism of it may be evident from the title and the feature found in the language of the inhabitants of Athshe: “A forest ecology is a delicate one. If the forest perishes, its fauna may go with it. The Athshean word for world is also the word forest.” (Le Guin. 1972: 35)

This image was repeatedly brought up throughout the story, as “Le Guin's fictions are all imbued with great sympathy for the strange “human” cultures they present. Nevertheless, the Athshean culture of “Forest” is her clearest example yet of a culture presented as in basic and violent conflict with present-day “Earth-normal” standards but still as unequivocally the saner of the two. Thus, the culture of the Athsheans, the ecology of Athshe, and the profound connections between them, are the focus of this novella.” (Barbour, 1974: 171)

On the other hand, Earth is deforested to such an extent that its lands resemble “deserts of cement” and where real big animals don’t exist even in the Himalayas, replaced with robodeer. Wood has become a resource more treasured than gold, and it is brought in from other planets, which as a consequence of this extraction are “cleaned up and cleaned out”. (Le Guin. 1972: 9)

People are depicted as cruel, merciless and to some extent dumb in their desire to get wood. Captain Davidson states: “It wasn’t like that in Ohio; if you wanted corn you grew corn, and no space wasted on trees and stuff. But then Earth was a tamed planet and New Tahiti wasn’t. That’s what he was here for: to tame it. If Dump Island was just rocks and gullies now, then scratch it; start over on a new island and do better. Can’t keep us down, we’re Men.” (Le Guin. 1972: 8)

The only source of reasonable and rational thought, respecting the country they currently live in, is hilfer (high intelligence life form specialist) such as Raj Lyubov. He is deeply concerned with native welfare, timberlands, flora, and fauna. However, the real power is the loggers, the Army with Colonel Davidson in charge. “Since the posthumans living back on Earth only see the end-products of these ecocidal atrocities, the novella allegorises the cognitive lacuna in our own world which lies between the violence of the Anthropocene and the tranquil everyday facade of our entirely causal consumerist behaviours.” (Hay, 2021: 7)

Colonel Davidson approves of the illegal hunting of red deer, rapes the Athshean women and considers them humanoid beings, with the nervous system as of a fish. He is ignorant to all the disastrous outcomes possible if they do not respect the local nature.

On this planet, the Athsheans live in harmony with nature because they feel it and treat it as something that has feelings as well. The trees are personified, and they are everywhere: “Roots, boles, branches, twigs, leaves overhead and underfoot and in your face and in your eyes, endless leaves on endless trees”. (Le Guin. 1972: 10) It promotes the idea that nature is not just a scene to be viewed, but a living entity with its own agency and power.

The nature there doesn't correspond with anything the humans have ever seen, so that it was difficult for them to comprehend: “The ground was not dry and solid, but damp and rather springy, product of the collaboration of living things with the long, elaborate death of leaves and trees; and from that rich graveyard grew ninety-foot trees, and tiny mushrooms that sprouted in circles half an inch across. The smell of the air was subtle, various, and sweet. The view was never long, unless looking up through the branches you caught sight of the stars.” (Le Guin. 1972: 17)

The “collaboration of living things” suggested by Le Guin is the coexistence of life and death, the so-called lifespan.

Another symbol of the forests in this novel is that the Athsheans have a deep spiritual connection to their land, and their way of life is profoundly tied to the laws of nature.

“The whole question of sanity, or balance, is argued in the concrete terms of fiction throughout the novel. There are two forms of art on Athshe, dreaming and singing, and both are specialized cultural activities which serve to nullify aggression against other humans.” (Barbour, 1974: 172)

The dreams are vital for Athsheans. Even Captain Davidson noticed it as he thought: “There was something about this damn

planet, its gold sunlight and hazy sky, its mild winds smelling of leaf mould and pollen, something that made you daydream.” (Le Guin. 1972: 11)

However, “Athsheans recognize a necessity for controlling one's dreams, for dreaming properly, but the devastating impact of the Terrans has resulted in a deep cultural trauma.” (Barbour, 1974: 172) They won't be able to have the same dreams again, as everything around and inside of them changed.

Eventually, after all the suffering the Athsheans endured, they finally overrule and decide to leave Captain to live on the small island which was once deforested by people.

Selver made this decision, explaining: «There aren't trees to cut on Rendlep. That's the place you call Dump Island. Your people left no trees there, so you can't make a boat and sail from it. Nothing much grows there any more, so we shall have to bring you food and wood to burn. There's nothing to kill on Rendlep. No trees, no people. There were trees and people, but now there are only the dreams of them. It seems to me a fitting place for you to live, since you must live. You might learn how to dream there, but more likely you will follow your madness through to its proper end, at last.» (Le Guin. 1972: 70)

And along with this, Le Guin raises an important question of how disruptive and threatening the human's impact is on something that is beneficial or, on the contrary, meaningless to them.

2.3 Ecocritical reception and interpretation of “The word for world is forest” by Ursula K. Le Guin

Le Guin’s novel has been widely recognised among critics and is a prominent work in the field of fiction. In the introduction to the novel, Ken MacLeod stated: “Ursula Le Guin may be the SF writer most respected by the literary mainstream, the most studied academically, her work set texts in countless courses. She remains subversive, and her work dangerous reading, because it changes the reader and makes them look at the real world in a different light. This novel's continuing relevance is a rebuke to our complacency.” (Le Guin. 1972: 4)

That statement perfectly reflects on the immense influence which Le Guin’s “The word...” produced on the society and has been doing that 50 years later. At that time, she won not only Hugo Award for her work, but also a further recognition of a person whose novel would be relevant throughout the years. The author herself understood that she had created a revolutionary novel. She wrote: “American involvement in Vietnam is now past; the immediately intolerable pressures have shifted to other areas; and so the moralising aspects of the story are now plainly visible. These I regret, but I do not disclaim them either. The work must stand or fall on whatever elements it preserved of the yearning that underlies all specific outrage and protest, whatever tentative outreaching it made, amidst anger and despair, towards justice, or wit, or grace, or liberty.” (Le Guin. 1972: 6)

She admitted the main emotional response it’s aimed to achieve from the readers. The protest, outrage, despair — these

emotions are there to support and enhance the audience's hatred and dissatisfaction in case there's another injustice.

The reference to the actions of the Terrans on Athshe and the American intervention in Vietnam is quite explicit and was never hidden, even highlighted by the origin of Earth's Colonel Dongh.

This served as a stark deviation from other science fiction narratives which used to glorify violence, war and technology.

However, "the obvious Vietnam analogy should not fail to direct one to other significant contemporary analogies — the genocide of the Guyaki Indians of Paraguay, or the genocide and deforestation along the Trans-Amazon Highway in Brazil, or even the general destruction of rain-forest habitats from Indonesia to Costa Rica. Le Guin's story is multi-applicable and multi-faceted." (Watson, 1975: 231)

The author created the story which could serve as an example to each outrageous burst of injustice. Its major focus was revolved around the ecological issues in this book from the very beginning, despite the usage of science fiction at that time mostly as a promotion of technological advancement rather than as warning against it.

That is what makes Le Guin's story even more complex, the fact of its being kind of an ecological pioneer in the genre of science fiction. In his work, Ian Watson highlighted: "The political facet aside, WWF is a vivid presentation of the dynamics of a sane society which lives in harmony with its natural environment because its members are themselves in psychological equilibrium." (Watson, 1975: 231)

The metaphor for a healthy society is more than revolutionary, contrasting it with many other science fiction stories which

presented humans as conquerors, rather than savages. Moreover, the aliens had never been presented earlier as creatures more developed and sustainable than humans.

Through *Lyubov*, she highlights that humans are not ultimately perfect, smart or kind. As he states, “I don't know what 'human nature' is. Maybe leaving descriptions of what we wipe out is part of human nature. Is it much pleasanter for an ecologist, really?” (Le Guin. 1972: 48) Le Guin demonstrates how unworthy of trust the humans are, how easy it is to become monsters for them and highlight that being human is not enough to be worth of living.

“The novel raises various questions about how closely connected people are to their environment, and how violence can disrupt the harmony established in their ecosystem of life. The novel does not answer all these questions, but by raising them it does call for an awareness of these matters – inviting and opening a door to collaboration from its readers. The reader, through experiencing the speculative world Le Guin creates in *The Word for World is Forest*, is offered the opportunity to view the conflicts from the novel in relation to their own reality” (Bijnen, 2019: 20)

However, not only positive reviews were made, as many still could find some points for which Le Guin could be blamed. Even though her work brought people's attention to such urgent and beneficial topics.

Marxists for instance blamed her for not judging the imperialistic grip strongly enough: “Certainly Le Guin's work as a whole is strongly pacifistic, and her novella “*The Word for World is Forest*” is (along with Aldiss' *Dark Light-Years*) one of the major SF denunciations of the American genocide in Vietnam. Yet it remains an ethical, rather than a socioeconomic, vision of imperialism, and

its last line extends the guilt of violence to even that war of national liberation of which it has just shown the triumph.” (Jameson, 1975: 226)

In addition, as was noted by Tony Burns: “The fact that Le Guin was and is a self-professed anarchist cut no ice with her then-critics, who considered anarchism to be nothing more than a pseudo-radical form of liberalism.” (Burns, 2004: 144)

Her anarchism and very radical comments regularly made her an object of people’s negative and offensive comments.

However, positive replies and many scientific papers are still written on a famous novel. It became an iconic scientific fiction novel about a dystopian future that can be and must be prevented from becoming our reality.

CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER 2

Ursula K. Le Guin's novel "The Word for World is Forest" brings out the idea of justice in a dystopian future where people began to colonize other planets. Le Guin reveals many important issues in her novel, such as humans' devastating impact on the environment and the possible consequences.

The violence that has fallen upon the planet is inseparably linked with the hatred inflicted upon its people. It was demonstrated through the Athsheans, who previously did not use to resort to brutality, before people had come.

The novel is about the concept of justice in the context of enslavement, environmental degradation, and colonial oppression and violence. By investigating the destruction and all the harm inflicted by people on of the planet Athshe and its indigenous inhabitants, the author highlights the drastic difference between mankind, so-called conquerors, and Athsheans, harmonious and peaceful creatures.

Additionally, the novel deals with symbolism and metaphorical representations of nature to underline all the main themes and ideas. Logically, the main symbol is forest. The lush forests of Athshe stand for a perfect world without people's deleterious effect on it, while Earth is depicted as a lifeless desert wiped out by deforestation and profiteering.

"The Word for World is Forest" serves as a cautionary tale about all the harmful effects of people's neglect and negative influence on the ecology. However, it didn't only receive the positive response from the audience, even though most of them were generally optimistic.

CONCLUSION

The term paper delves into the analysis of ecocriticism as a literary theory, which can be divided in three waves and officially started to shape as a separate discipline in the 1990s. Ecocriticism focuses on the interpretation of nature in literature and seeks to promote ecological awareness amongst people.

As ecocriticism continues to evolve, it additionally provides a framework for exploration of the representation of nature in literature in many historical periods and various cultural milieus. From the sublime scenes of American Romanticism to the present-day perspectives on urban environmentalism, ecocriticism can serve as a multifaceted tool for understanding how literature influences people's perception of the natural world. Modern American authors are mostly focused on the voicing of environmental problems and warning against global disasters.

In my work, a famous scientific fiction novel “The Word for World is Forest” was analysed for ecocritical features. It appears to have the elements of ecojustice with the certain perspective on political system, social structure and the intersection of violence and ecological devastation on a planet where there is a perfect balance between flora, fauna and its inhabitants. The work emphasizes the necessity to preserve nature and to be aware of one’s influence on it. It also demonstrates the inevitable change that happens once violence is inflicted on the land and its residents.

In the end, “The Word for World is Forest” stands as a testimony to Le Guin's literary talents and her passionate dedication to challenging prevailing cultural norms, motivating readers to reconsider and reevaluate their attitude towards nature.

SUMMARY

Ecocriticism is a literary theory which became more relevant in the previous decades due to the higher ecological awareness amongst people. It was formally divided into three waves and all of them possess some particular features. We are currently in the third period of ecocriticism's development, and this one is mostly focused on the negative aspects of relations between people and the Earth.

One of the most important environmental issues is deforestation and destruction of the natural habitats, and that is why in this term paper a relevant novel was analysed. "The Word for World is Forest" delves into the problems of colonization, enslavement, oppression, and violence which people inflicted upon a peaceful planet.

Special prominence should be given to the study of symbolic and metaphorical representations in the book, that play a crucial role in interpreting its main themes and ideas.

The term paper consists of an introduction, two chapters, conclusions, and a list of references.

Keywords: ecocriticism, ecology, ecojustice, representation in literature, environmental problems, ecological awareness, violence, oppression, colonialism, collaboration of living things, inhabitants.