

Ecocriticism and Children's Literature: Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax* as an Example

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Abstract

Ecocriticism gained a growing interest from researchers and writers on different levels to examine the significance of this newly added area of literary studies. It enabled the readers to understand their society's environmental issues in a better way and encouraged them to deal with them positively. It also drew attention to the different negative behaviors and attitudes towards nature to the limit that may damage natural resources and affect future generations. Furthermore, ecocriticism played a vital role in restructuring a more balanced and harmonious relationship between human and non-human beings within society by building a peaceful coexistence among all members of society. This paper offers the necessary theoretical framework for ecocriticism and examines its mechanisms to analyze literary texts. The paper also testifies the relationship between ecocriticism and children's literature to show the best ways of using these children's books to build a robust background for those young generations and to form their attitudes toward natural resources for the betterment of all in a more sustainable society. Finally, the paper examines Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax* as an example of a children's book with many environmental references and educational lessons. *The Lorax*'s story revolves around the Once-ler, who destroys the balance between nature and other factors through his insistence on mass-producing useless and environmentally harmful goods. Ecocritics used this story to expose different messages about environmental responsibility and the consequences of reckless attitudes toward natural resources. In this way, the paper encourages the importance of further studies on ecocriticism and the further enhancement of using children's books to increase environmental awareness.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Children's books, Sustainability, Environment

1. Introduction

Over the past few years, environmental issues have seriously threatened modern communities and Mother Earth. Human beings heavily misuse all the available natural resources to maximize their immediate benefits without thinking about the situation of future generations, and this excessive use might leave all people on the brink of the ditch. Subsequently, everyone struggled with the massive decrease in fossil fuel, many rainforests cut down, the unbearably high temperature, and the disorder of the season cycle. So, researchers and educators have tried to find a way to increase awareness of nature's significance and the different ecological issues. Scientific discoveries failed to achieve this goal and successfully combat these immersive threats once we realized the importance of examining literature from an ecological perspective. Hence, environmental issues became popular, and the young generations became more involved by reading or watching these ecology-based literary texts and movies. So, readers and writers tried to use a vital tool to discover relevant references to nature and ecological catastrophes, "Ecocriticism."

Ecocriticism is a theoretical framework that emerged in the late 20th century as a response to the increasing attentiveness of environmental issues and the need to analyze literature relevant to natural resources. It is an interdisciplinary field of literary and cultural studies that seeks to understand the relationship between literature and the environment. It examines how literary works shaped and reflected our understanding of nature and our place within it. In 1978, William Rueckert was the first to coin "ecocriticism" in his article "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism." Linguistically, the word 'eco' came from the Greek root 'oikos,' which etymologically meant household or Earth, and 'logy' from 'logos' means logical discourse. Together, they referred to criticism of the house environment as represented in Literature (Frederick, 2012, p. 147). Throughout ecocriticism, the critics sought to shed light on the environmental values and ideologies shaping both the work and the readers' understanding.

According to ecocriticism, readers appreciate nature, represented in literary texts as beautiful natural aspects like plants, flowers, rivers, and animals, and as the overall structure of the physical environment that includes all human and non-human beings. Ecocriticism here is mainly interested in examining the harmony and peaceful coexistence between the two components of the physical structure of the environment. This harmony can produce a healthy ecosystem that benefits all human beings and the Earth and achieve the ultimate sustainability of these resources for future generations. Frederick stated, "The modern ecological consciousness feels that the balance between humans and the natural world must be maintained. A perfect ecology is one in which plants, animals, birds, and human beings live in harmony that none dominates or destroys the other" (Frederick, 2012, p. 147). Hence, the significance of ecocriticism lies in its ability to raise awareness about environmental issues, foster ecological consciousness, and promote sustainable practices. By analyzing literature through an environmental

lens, ecocriticism encourages discussions on climate change, biodiversity loss, and human impacts on ecosystems. It also contributes to understanding our interconnectedness with nature and inspires efforts toward environmental stewardship and conservation.

Another perspective is that there is an inevitable link between ecocriticism and children's literature. It is well-stated that children's literature often incorporates themes related to nature, animals, and the environment. So, the relationship between ecocriticism and children's literature can be seen in how the writers compose the environmental themes and messages in these books to approach young readers. Ecocriticism, as applied to children's literature, is concerned with the natural world's content and point of view and with creating a conservation ethic in our young readers: a greater sense of what Director Duckworth K. said he wanted to learn in his trip across America. Ecocriticism is concerned with how these themes are approached, what values they promote, and what they mean to the young readers of today--how far from their natural world reading experience might they be taken in each case? The ecocritical evaluation of children's books is aimed at whether such literature can lead children to love nature, develop an environmental conscience, and live sustainably. An environmental perspective also helps parents choose children's books, encouraging earth-friendly behavior. Finally, an ecocritical interpretation of children's literature helps teachers, parents, and authors correctly appraise those books that effectively carry environmental messages and contribute to the ecological enlightenment of youngsters. Integrating ecocritical perspectives into children's literature becomes a powerful tool to instill environmental consciousness, inspire environmental activism, and shape the next generation's relationship with the natural world.

2. Ecocriticism: A Theoretical Framework

Generally speaking, the relationship between humans and nature is complicated and moves through different stages. From the early days of existence, humans have had a pragmatic and beneficial relationship to use all other non-human beings/elements to meet and satisfy their needs and desires, starting from the plants and moving to the animals and all other species in this universe. In other words, human beings throughout these years have taken nature for granted as the base to depend on to continue their life and as a source of their survival. This interdependent relationship has offended nature; the only beneficiary is the human being, regardless of the damage he left behind. According to Simon Estok, this relationship reflects an argumentative attitude toward nature, "believing that human success and comfort require us to control and abuse nature rather than to live in a kind of communal, cooperative relationship with other species" (Slovic, 2015, pp. 1-2). On the other side, some scholars constantly refer to a natural "default" love of nature from the human side. This feeling of love may encourage others to care for anything related to nature and raise debates over environmental issues to increase people's awareness. These two contradicting views reflect nature's profound suffering and expose the gap among people towards ecological concerns.

For a long time, literature has reflected nature to depict the cheerful side and value the beauty of natural elements. Historically, literary works used many natural references, and the critics paid efforts to examine and expose these references without focusing on ecological concerns. The reader can find many of these literary genres from the early ages to the 19th century. Ecocriticism has developed an international revisionist movement in examining literary texts with a new dimension of focusing on ecological references and issues. Hereafter, ecocritics started to examine literary works from ecological perspectives for a better understanding and intense awareness of nature and environmental concerns. Until now, ecocritics worked on developing the nature of this new field of criticism and expanding its scope. In the late 20th century, the exact term "ecocriticism" was used by William Rueckert and spread among scholars. A few years later, particularly in the 1990s, critics started using this term to examine literary texts according to ecological-focused concerns (Slovic, 2015, p. 4).

All definitions of ecocriticism usually "start by linking the literary movement to the global crisis. The link implies that the fundamental purpose of the work is to be part of an attempt to change culture and, through culture, change policy and behavior. Taking the crisis entails this commitment seriously" (Garrard, 2014, pp. 362-363). For instance, ecocriticism can be defined as "the field of study that examines the link between literature and the physical world" (Glottfelty & Fromm, 1996, p. xviii). Moreover, it can be explained as "the environmental turn in literary studies is best understood and less as a monolith than as a concourse of discrepant practices" (Buell, 2005, p. 11). Or as "the field of inquiry that analyzes and promoted literary works of art which raise ethical queries about human contacts with nature, while inspiring people to live within a limit that will be obligatory over generations" (Gomides, 2006, p.16).

Due to the novelty of this term and the complexities of applying environmental perspectives to literary texts, in addition to the marginality of ecological thinking in specific regions and some cultures, ecocriticism faced many challenges at the beginning of its existence. For instance, it "has been stalled by too slight an attention to nonfiction prose and the fiction of nonfictional; people have limited by a focus on American and British literature" (Murphy, 1999, p. 58). On the other hand, scholars insisted on enhancing awareness about the significance of this newly examined field of study. Murphy mentioned that:

In order to broaden the acceptance of readers and critics, it is necessary to reconsider the benefits of specific genres and particular national literature and certain ethnicities within those national kinds of literature. Such reconsideration will enable greater inclusiveness of literature from around the world within the conception of nature-oriented or environment-based literature. It will also empower critics and readers such as "myself," who emphasize principally American literature, to place it in a globally relative and comparative framework. [I] see such reexamination as one of the ways by which we can polish our consciousness and enlarge the area of ecocriticism. (Murphy, 1999, p.58)

Therefore, the ecocritical approaches have evolved considerably, and many ecocritics have started to examine literary texts from ecological perspectives. Readers have become more aware of identifying the environmental issues mentioned in many books. Likewise, the

writers used these literary texts to strengthen their interest in nature and its related issues. It is worth noting that this progression has moved according to different stages, as mentioned by Lawrence Buell:

No decisive map of environmental criticism in literary studies can [...] be drawn. Still, one can identify several trend lines marking a progression from a "first wave" of ecocriticism to a "second" or newer pragmatic wave or waves increasingly evident today. However, this first-second wave distinction should not imply a neat, distinctive series. Most streams set in motion by early ecocriticism endure to run strong, and most forms of second-wave revisionism include building on and disagreeing with ancestors. In this sense, "palimpsest" would be a better metaphor than "wave." (Buell, 2005, p.17)

Historically, the first wave of ecocriticism progression started around 1980 before the term was used. During this stage, the critics examined non-human or natural references without focusing on these environmental issues or interest in teaching readers anything about ecological culture. During this wave, the ecocritics were interested in "preserving biotic community" (Coupe, 2010, p. 4) and, as William Howarth explained, "the effects of culture upon nature, to celebrate nature, berate its despoilers, and reversing their harm through political action" (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996, p. 69). On the other hand, the second stage started around the mid-1990s, and the authors, readers, and critics were working together to focus on the environmental perspectives in the literary texts. Many literary texts were written mainly to draw attention to all issues related to nature and ecology. Also, the human-nature relationship was examined extensively to clarify the inappropriate and aggressive human treatment of nature.

Accordingly, the ecocritical view has been developed to investigate various literary features of the work from a natural, cultural, educational, and political point of view. The ecocritical framework may include certain features like representation of nature and natural elements in the literary work, the other physical surroundings and their impacts on the texts, the metaphors and figurative devices used in the text to describe nature, the nature of the relationship between the different life elements, and the human impacts on nature and other firms of the ecosystem (Das, 2020, p. 161). Amid the rapidly increasing environmental crisis, the main task of ecocritics is establishing a solid eco-consciousness among the readers (adults and children). To achieve this task, they examine the literary texts differently, with a significant focus on the outer layout of these texts. They urge the rejection of the belief that natural resources are given for granted (Mishra, 2016, p. 169). Ecocritics usually try to develop this awareness of unsustainable activities and the relationship imbalance between humans and non-human beings.

According to ecocriticism, the literary work is examined according to certain features and elements to tackle the text from the ecological perspective. For example, ecocriticism places nature at the center of analysis, recognizing the importance of the natural world as a subject of study in literature. It examines how nature is shown, stood for, and depicted in books. It studies how writers create their stories or poems about the environment. Next, ecocriticism says we need to make things fair regarding the environment. It means fixing problems with money and power related to hurting nature or having access only to a few people who are richer than others. It shows how writing can reveal and fight powers causing unfairness to the environment. It supports fair treatment between people and nature. Next, it understands how books can help create green thinking. It means seeing and describing better ways for people to harmonize with nature. It looks at how books make readers feel more connected to nature, think about their environmental beliefs in a new light, and imagine different lifestyles balanced with the environment. Ecocriticism lets us see how literature and nature connect deeply. It shows why looking at the environment is important while reading, which helps flexible thinking about our duties to protect the Earth. It shows how reading can help us know more about the environment, fairness, and keeping things going.

Because the field is growing and there are more threats to nature, ecocriticism has been vital in teaching kids about Mother Earth. It affects how people learn new things. This way, it helps both grown-ups and children better understand what is happening around them. So, ecocriticism is about making people aware of environmental problems and putting a spotlight on today's struggles with the environment. It knows that words and stories can change how we see the world. Ecocritics study how writers show nature in their work. They find hidden ideas, thoughts, and values about the environment that can change what people think or care about when they read those stories.

Most importantly, ecocriticism makes us think about what is right and wrong with how we treat the environment. It also reminds humans of their moral duties towards nature. It looks into how books can form our moral rules and check out the beliefs that guide us in dealing with nature. Ecocritics study the nature values in text to make readers think about their environmental beliefs. They inspire them to do good for the Earth and change things positively.

From the late 19th century until now, the reader may find many literary books written to address or examine environmental issues from the ecological lens. We can start with Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1854), which showcases his deep connection with nature and his examination of the relationship between humans and the natural world. Ecocritics often analyze this text for its portrayal of environmental stewardship, simplicity, and the critique of industrialization. Another example can be Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962). Although it is not a fictional story, Carson's groundbreaking work on the harmful effects of pesticides deserves mention due to its impact on environmental awareness and activism. Ecocritics explore how Carson's text raises significant ecological concerns and highlights the importance of biodiversity and environmental preservation. The third example is John Steinbeck's famous novel, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939).

The story also offers rich material for ecocritical analysis. Steinbeck portrays the devastating impact of the Dust Bowl on farmers and explores the human-nature relationship, emphasizing the destruction of the land and the exploitation of natural resources during the Great Depression. In this context, the last example is Richard Powers' *The Overstory* (2018). This novel textures the stories of different characters

and their deep connection with trees. Ecocritics examines how Powers explores the intricate relationships between humans, nature, and the interconnectedness of all living beings through the lens of environmental destruction and activism. These few stories represent just a tiny sample of the many literary works that can be studied through ecocriticism. By focusing on narratives that tackle ecological themes, ecocritics contribute to a deeper understanding of our place in the natural world and the importance of environmental consciousness.

3. Ecocriticism and Its Mechanism

In parallel with the growing interest in the environment, there is a rising question about the role of humanities in general and literary studies. To answer this question, we should examine the main tasks of humanists according to their vocations. Humanists should reflect on the surrounding issues and problems in their literary texts to offer the problems and draw attention to the possible solutions for the good of their communities. In other words, they should reflect the voices of the people to highlight the drawbacks in their communities and express their worries about the future of the young generations. On top of these problems, environmental issues can be prominent in their debates and studies. Throughout the literary texts, the writers can expose the contradicting points of view, behaviors, and attitudes towards nature and the different natural resources. In addition, the writers can construct a positive attitude and a more sustainable tendency to deal with nature to maintain the harmony between human beings and nature.

The most prominent and one of the earliest examples of these texts is the epic poem, *Epic of Gilgamesh*. This text's central theme revolves around the relationship between wildness and civilization and how civilized people can manage the wild to make them behave civilized. In this regard, most of the mentioned attitudes aim to treat natural resources wisely and sustainably (Murphy et al., 1998, p. xiii). This type of relationship was tackled and examined many times in the history of literature to the extent that it developed to form the relationship between literature and the environment. This modern form of relationship composed a new field of study: Ecocriticism. It is worth noting that ecocriticism is quickly changing and has evolved from focusing on local interests to tackling global issues and phenomena (Garrard, 2014, p. 178). The most crucial technique in this field is focusing on the local weaknesses to draw attention to the comprehensive global picture. In this way, the impact of its study may be broadened to include all relevant parties worldwide.

With the development of environmental awareness, critics found that literary texts should be examined according to the valuable messages and learned lessons that the reader can understand about ecological issues. The authors should examine their attitude to handling the issue and to enable the readers to understand the scope of this issue. In addition, a certain number of writers may take a more efficient way of dealing with these issues by responding to an inevitable environmental crisis in a particular place or area to shed light and give a proper response. In this way, the readers should be aware of the intimate relationship between the literary text and its surrounding environment or the cultural context in general. The student of literary studies understands that the writer should, in one way or another, reflect his background or ideology throughout the text. Glotfelty states, "Literary theory generally examines the relations between writers, texts, and the world. In most literary theories, 'the world' is synonymous with society – the social sphere. Ecocriticism develops the conception of 'the world' to embrace the all-inclusive ecosphere" (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996, pp. 229-36).

In this regard, ecocriticism may significantly broaden the ecosystem's scope by paying more attention to how humans deal with natural resources. On the other hand, this statement may raise another problematic situation about the significance of this field of criticism, as ecocritics are more interested in dealing with non-human topics than humans. This fact can decrease the way of dealing with the ecocritical analysis or, to some extent, can not provoke the required arguments over the mentioned topics (Howarth, 1996, pp. 69-91). Hereafter, the literary texts may fail to recall the necessary ethical commitment to environmental issues. Notably, most ecocritical analytical studies are written originally in English and restricted to American literary studies, but gradually, these studies have moved to include other areas from different cultures (Mihaljevic & Kakkonen, 2016, p. 19). Later, many research papers started to be published to examine different types of books from different cultures, which indicates the increasing awareness and interest in this kind of study.

Consequently, the writers found a way in these books to convey the required messages to match with the set of Sustainable Development Goals "SDGs." Most of these papers reflect the Western point of view and their beliefs about the environmental stressing crisis. Therefore, ecocriticism reflects the relationship between nature and its society. Accordingly, a clear reflection of the environmental crises in the literary texts and the reflection of the people's attitudes toward these issues is expected. Due to the notable impact of literature on different levels of people and different ages (children and adults), the environmental crisis has started to be the prominent threat that faces the globe, and people are well aware of this threat regardless of the level of handling the issue.

The interrelationship between human beings and nature, which exists in every society, is clearly stated and introduced in the study of ecocriticism. Furthermore, ecocriticism offers what can be called "reciprocal dependence" (Howarth, 1996, p. 60) to justify the necessity of creating harmony between nature and all human beings. Also, ecocriticism introduces the concept of horizontal society to refer to the coexistence among all living beings without referring to a hierarchy or differences among the different members of the society. In general, ecocriticism shows that there is always a way to create this reciprocal relationship. Other critics contradict this view and mention that ecocriticism enhances the social hierarchy between non-human beings and human beings, like the difference between women and men or adults and children (Meeker, 1997, p. 62).

One of the main techniques in highlighting the environmental issue in the literary texts lies in the earlier-mentioned concept of "reciprocal relationship." This term allows the reader to analyze the different levels of this relationship in the vertical societies and examine the strengths of each part to understand the root causes of many environmental issues. It also enables the community of readers, "particularly" children, to move from these vertical societies to construct horizontal societies concerning the importance of each member in the society

without marginalizing their role in creating peaceful and balanced coexistence for the better of all. For instance, in literary texts, the ecocritics analyze the marginalized characters to identify their weaknesses and to shed light on and try to find a way to empower them from the social perspective to have a more active role in their societies. Hence, one part of this active role should be dedicated to tackling environmental issues and raising the overall awareness of the community. To conclude this part, we may mention that human beings are in need to have this balanced lifestyle to avoid more punishment by nature, as mentioned in this quote, "human beings are more and more suffering from the punishment inflicted by nature" (Wang, 2009, p. 289). As a result, ecocriticism gained a growing advantage to attract more critics and writers to aim to re-form a more balanced and harmonious ecological system to maintain more sustainable resources for future generations.

4. Ecocriticism and Children's Literature

As mentioned before, the environmental crisis can be considered a commanding issue threatening human beings and their existence. So, teaching children many things about nature, the ecosystem, and other relevant issues is imperative. This next generation must be aware of the current ecological issues and environmental status in general. In this case, children's books may play an essential role in raising their awareness and enhancing their knowledge about nature and the fair dealing with natural resources. As per many studies and research, children's literature achieved considerable results in building a positive attitude toward nature in children's minds and raising eco-consciousness. Makwanyana and Dick mentioned in their research that "children's literature endorses environmental consciousness, appreciation, knowledge, and stewardship of the children. In addition, to inculcate a long-lasting imprint on environmental stewardship, it has been determined that catching them young is the best method" (Makwanyana & Dick, 2014, p. 10).

To contest this miserable environmental status, children should be at the heart of this existing battle, per UNICEF's perspective, to maintain environmental sustainability and reach our desired future. It refers to the significant role that children may play in the future as the primary driver of sustainable development. Those children are the future makers, and the interest in increasing their awareness should be genuine. Adults should treat them as progress achievers and keepers of peaceful human existence. Undoubtedly, children are sensitive enough to be objects of environmental destruction, and their bodies and brains are highly vulnerable to these side effects. So, "Environmentalism is a must-have for people from all walks of life" (Gitau, 2011, p. 305). Accordingly, ecocriticism and children's literature should be interrelated to do this task and to "promote environmental consciousness, appreciation, knowledge, and stewardship with children" (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996, p. xxxi).

Ecocriticism significantly impacts the analysis and understanding of children's literature. It gives a way to look at how kids' books show and connect with nature. Also, it helps develop their thoughts on the environment and what they think is essential. Kids' books are necessary for teaching young readers about nature. Ecocriticism looks at how kids' books teach about nature, ideas of the environment, and sustainability rules. It checks how well these teaching words work and measures their possible effect on kids' knowledge of nature while they protect it.

Moreover, ecocriticism wants to make kids' books support saving the environment and get young readers interested in doing something for it. It looks at how books for kids show environmental issues, unfairness towards people, and how humans affect nature. It also checks if these writings make kids want to do something. It helps them see the need to care about nature and be responsible and active citizens aware of their environment. Importantly, ecocriticism focuses on including voices and perspectives of the less important in kids' books. It examines how various people, cultures, and groups connect with the environment. Ecocritics examine how environmental justice problems are shown in stories, like unfair access to stuff and racism against the environment. They aim for fairness by including everyone in children's books. Ecocriticism makes kids' books more interesting by looking at their nature themes, how they show the world, and what we can learn from them. It makes writers and readers think about how people affect the environment and helps teach kids to care for nature so they become responsible and influential eco-minded persons.

5. The Lorax: Ecocritical Analysis

To start with the main background, Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax* was copyrighted in 1971, the same year Greenpeace was founded and with the beginning of the modern environmental movement (Lewis, 2008). As a children's story, the book was adapted into a film in 2012 to enhance the story's messages and be more accessible to more children. The story and the film have many things that enhance the children's awareness of nature, the environment, and all relative ecological issues. *The Lorax*'s writer, Dr. Seuss (Theodor Seuss Geisel), gained his reputation as a writer of many children's books like *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street* (1937) and *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* (1957), but he considered his story *The Lorax* (1971) as his personal favorite (Dominy et al., 2018, p. 1196). Moreover, Dr. Seuss wrote over sixty children's books that were crucial in the history of the children's arena and popular culture. In one of his interviews, he elucidated that his books were written for adults and children to refer to environmental issues, policies, and materialism. He said, "I do not write for children. I write for people" (Gorman & Corwin, 1991, para. 66). Dr. Seuss's style of writing is characterized by a combination of humor and seriousness with a cover of wisdom that can be fit to convey instructional messages. So, his stories should be paramount in increasing ecological awareness (ÇETİNER, 2020, p. 34).

Due to the appealing nature of the story's topic and raising issues, *The Lorax* attracted a considerable amount of critical commentaries. Nevertheless, critics considered the story rhetorical with a "straight propaganda message" (Morgan & Morgan, 1996, p. 209). The writer described the story as coming "from annoyance over the fact that natural resources were being plundered- not just lumber but land and other things dumb for reasons like greed" (Nel, 1999, p. 210). Like many children's books, the reader may find the book simple and superficial, but

it is the first stance impression. *The Lorax* may have more complicated and profound lessons, but the story can transfer a moral message to the readers through the content, the language, and the characters. For example, The Once-ler can reflect the traditional and stereotypical image of the industrialists whose "inventiveness, his self-reliance, his work ethic, his sense of family values, and his attempt to justify his product based on pragmatism" (Marshall, 1996, p. 87). It is a clear message to attack industrializing everything in our lives and looking for financial benefits regardless of other consequences. On the other hand, the protagonist of this story, *The Lorax*, represents nature and strives throughout the story to save non-human beings in his place. Some critics attack Dr. Seuss for making this character passive enough to do some actions against the Once-ler and have only a few hopes of success with "BIGGERING and BIGGERING and BIGGERING and BIGGERING" (Dr. Seuss, 1971, p. 55)

The story opens with a young boy moving around to reach the last point of the town through the streets of Raising Lorax and pale land without any live plants or flowers. This dull portrayal made by the author, "where the Grickle-grass grows, and the wind smells slow and sour when it blows" (Dr. Seuss, 1971, p. 1), can create irritable and quaking.

Feeling and responses against the story's overall theme can also shed light on the warning about the final fate of our planet if we continue with the same attitude against the environment. Throughout this introductory imagery, expressive words can encourage people to take immediate steps towards sustainable ways of life and motivate the readers to know the reasons behind this dull, well-described image foreshadowed by the writer. Another vital reference that should be highlighted in this introduction is describing the young boy as the protagonist of this story. From the early beginning, the author wants to lay the responsibility of maintaining this planet on the shoulders of the new generations and raise their awareness about the miserable status of nature due to the irresponsible attitudes of adults. Dr. Seuss clarifies from the beginning that trust should be granted to children, and we must invest in educating them well to save nature and our planet in general.

This introduction adds a cautionary taste to the whole story to threaten people about the negative impacts of environmental exploitation, industrialization, and irresponsible treatment of natural resources.

The story revolves around two main characters of young boys: the antagonist, The Once-ler, who is described as "an entrepreneur ... who chops down Truffala Trees in order to weave their tufts into shapeless garments called Thneeds" (Marshall, 1996, p. 86) and the protagonist The Lorax who is a "sort of a man ... shortish. And oldish. And Brownish. And mossy. Who spoke with a voice that was sharpish and bossy" (Dr. Seuss, 1971, p. 21). The dialogues and conflicts between the two characters reveal the deep gap between the people towards dealing with nature according to their materialistic interests and benefits. For example, the Once-ler negligence towards The Lorax's objections reflects the insistence of many business people to hurt nature and damage anything to gain profits. The Once-ler replies to Lorax's threats, "Tell for the trees, for the trees have no speeches" (Dr. Seuss, 1971, p. 23). Due to this conflict and the Once-ler's negligence, the environment is destroyed, and all trees vanish due to the expansion of Once-ler's business. It is a straightforward alert about ecological catastrophe, and the story implies an explicit moral lesson to urge the readers to redeem nature. Cutting trees or deforestation is only one lesson of the broader message and overall threat against all types of air pollution, human greedy treatment of nature, and excessive use of inorganic materials and chemicals.

As per many studies, Dr. Seuss has achieved many goals through these personified characters and cunning language items and has successfully pushed the efforts to support nature forward. Due to the popularity of this story, the author received some messages from children to inform him that they "do something" as a reaction to his story and his warnings about the fate of human life (Nel, 1999, p. 174) and the Lorax's character has become iconic as an environmental supporter, "Be a Lorax Helper—Help Build the Dr. Seuss Lorax Forest" (Nel, 1999, p. 174) to the limit that many attempts paid to stop publishing this book in different regions in the world.

6. *The Lorax*: Concluding Messages and Lessons

The Lorax by Dr. Seuss is a prime example of a children's book that can be analyzed through an ecocritical lens. By examining the book's themes, characters, and message, we can gain insights into its ecological representations and environmental values. *The Lorax* by Dr. Seuss reveals its powerful environmental message and critique of human impact on nature. The story, which takes place in the fictional world of Truffula trees and exploited for their resources by the Once-ler can, highlights the following messages—first, the unfair human treatment and its impacts on nature. The central theme of *The Lorax* revolves around the damaging concerns of human activities on the environment. Through the character of the Once-ler, Dr. Seuss highlights the adverse effects of greed, industrialization, and deforestation. The Once-ler's relentless exploitation of the Truffula trees results in the pollution and devastation of the surrounding ecosystem, emphasizing the importance of considering the environmental consequences of our actions.

Moreover, *The Lorax* challenges anthropocentrism, the belief that human beings are the center of the universe, by emphasizing the intrinsic value of nature. The Lorax represents biocentrism, advocating for the rights and well-being of the natural world and highlighting the importance of preserving ecosystems and biodiversity. So, the author personifies nature, giving it agency and a voice. The Lorax speaks for the trees and the natural world, advocating for their protection and preservation. Dr. Seuss encourages young readers to develop empathy and a sense of environmental responsibility by assigning nature a distinct personality.

Second, the excessive environmental exploitation. *The Lorax* critiques the culture of consumerism and its detrimental impact on the environment. The Once-ler's relentless pursuit of profit destroys the Truffula trees and the ecosystem they support. Through this narrative, the story critiques the detrimental consequences of human greed, overconsumption, and the exploitation of natural resources. Also, in portraying Thneed, a useless product made from the Truffula trees, Dr. Seuss exposes the cycle of overconsumption and waste. It highlights

the loss of habitats, pollution, and species extinction due to unsustainable practices. This ecological perspective encourages readers, especially children, to understand the long-term impacts of environmental degradation. This critique encourages children to question their consumption patterns and consider the environmental implications of their choices.

The final message is increasing ecological awareness and environmental education. *The Lorax* also promotes environmental activism and the idea that individuals have the power to make a difference. The Once-ler's regret and the book's final message convey the importance of taking action to reverse environmental degradation and protect the natural world. This encouraging message encourages young readers to become proactive in their environmental efforts. So, the story serves as an educational tool, raising children's awareness about environmental issues. The vivid illustrations and playful rhymes engage young readers in the story while delivering a powerful message about the importance of environmental preservation. The book inspires children to become informed and curious about the natural world, empowering them to make informed choices. It also educates children about environmental degradation, the need for responsible behavior, and the power of individual action. Through its engaging narrative and vibrant illustrations, Dr. Seuss effectively communicates ecological awareness and encourages young readers to become proactive environmental advocates.

7. *The Lorax*: Another Point of View

Despite Seuss's book's sizeable literary output and the profound influence from the environmental perspective and educational angle, relatively few authors criticized the book overtly and harshly. Some writers moved beyond the educational impacts and started thinking about the content and other references cited from the text. For instance, Dr. Seuss was criticized for intensifying the notion of promiscuity. At the same time, the Lorax himself is capable of untold unconventionality, including rape: "[h]aving violated his target, having enforced himself, ('lifted himself by the seat of his slacks') on a woman in the gloom (a hole in the smog'), the Lorax flees from the scene of his crime" (Strong, 1977, p. 37). Additionally, some critics condemned the lack of female characters in many of Dr. Seuss's books. They found that most female portrayals have had "weak minds; they must not be ambitious, even in the imagination" (Lurie, 1990, p. 51). Furthermore, critics found Dr. Seuss's characters were "every child" and animals of a specific gender (Nel, 1999, p. 175). This point can be justified from the perspective that these books were written specifically to approach children and aimed at educating them on these environmental lessons and increasing ecological awareness.

To some extent, other critics examined his strategy of exposing the ecological controversy with both sides and in an even-handed manner by using some terms such as "poignant" and "sobering" (Zicht, 1991, p. 27), while others suggested that *The Lorax* is "in keeping with the rhetoric of uncompleted and unexamined thinking that leaves polar disagreement intact and allows foundational, cultural conventions and practices to go unchallenged" (Henderson et al., 2004, p. 130). From the perspective of language style, Nel and Barron examined the deconstruction of Dr. Seuss's language. They found that the effect that might be left can be redemptive on the reader as Dr. Seuss's books were mainly didactic, not teaching children through delivering lectures but encouraging them to adopt some behaviors and attitudes. So, the style of using homogenic discourse can be fundamental in such cases. In addition, positioning the reader as a boy in the discourse of the narrative can be disappointing for another gender; "presenting environmental issues through particular discourses . . . will not necessarily disrupt other hegemonic discourses, thus leaving the status quo intact" (Barron, 1995, p. 117).

8. Conclusion

Due to the multiple environmental and eco-disasters, our world is now at stake and faces many challenges. Science and technology can not face these issues alone or combat these rising threats. So, the significance of ecocriticism in literature lies in its ability to explain the complicated connections between literature and the environment. It offers a robust explanatory framework that enriches the readers' understanding of literary texts, enhances a deeper appreciation for the natural elements, and fosters a sense of responsibility toward its sustainability. Through ecocriticism, the reader can bridge literature with other fields, such as ecology, philosophy, sociology, and anthropology. It develops interdisciplinary dialogue and collaboration in tackling ecological issues effectively. This interdisciplinary study allows for a more inclusive understanding of environmental challenges and encourages a more holistic perspective on sustainability. Embedding the ecocritical analysis into studying the literary texts may encourage a shift towards ecological thinking and foster the coexistence between human and non-human beings to create a more balanced ecological system, which may result in more respectful and sustainable relationships with the environment. On the other hand, ecocriticism should be utilized to promote the SDGs in educational contexts to enhance the young generations' background and positive attitudes toward environmental issues. From this point, ecocriticism can build this mutual relationship between environment, literature, and education.

The paper discusses the reflection of ecocriticism in children's books and how it can educate young generations about their environmental issues and concepts. For many reasons, it is stated that the best way and channel to convey these messages should be through the children's stories, as cultural ideologies offered to children about the environment can shape their cognitions, perceptions, attitudes, and behavior toward their environment. For this reason, it is essential to create well-established images, texts, and ideologies about nature through children's literature. Through these images, we can efficiently teach the values of environmental movement through children's literature. Most importantly, we can leave an ever-lasting profound impact on the mentality and psyche of those children from their early years towards their society, environment, and culture in general. So, the paper drew attention to the necessity of making this connection between ecocriticism and children's books to find the reflection of the natural elements and the best ways of dealing with them.

Finally, in this paper, *The Lorax* is an example of a children's book with clear and robust environmental messages. Dr. Seuss's story offers a powerful ecocritical work that engages young and old readers to think positively about their environmental status in environmental

discourse. For several years, the story effectively raised awareness about the importance of environmental stewardship, the need for sustainable practices, and the consequences of neglecting our obligation to look after and maintain the natural world. Due to the popularity of this book, it has received various critical commentaries about its influence and impact on the readers. The majority applauded the clarity of the message and the educational method used to transfer the messages. Nevertheless, others criticized the portrayal of the weak members of society and their passive interaction with environmental issues. In brief, *The Lorax's* unmistakable message inspires environmental activism and responsibility through taking active steps to speak up and find sustainable solutions.

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