

ON ECOCRITICISM FORMATION WITHIN THE ANGLO-AMERICAN CONTEXT

As the study of the relationship between literature and the environment, ecocriticism takes the nature-centered approach to the literary studies which cause the appearance of some essential aspects such as Nature Writing, Environmental Literature, Literature of Wilderness.

The literary premises of the contemporary ecological criticism can be traced to the works by three leading American writers of the XIX-th century, who glorified the life in the innocent American nature of those times. They were *Ralph Waldo Emerson* (1803-1882), *Margaret Fuller* (1810-1850) and *Henry David Thoreau* (1817-1862) known better as transcendentalists – the first American literary movement which was "culturally independent" of the European samples. It is their three works – *Emerson's "Nature"* (1836), *Fuller's "Summer on the Lakes"* (1843) and *Thoreau's "Walden"* (1845-1847) – that gave rise to the American «ecologically centered writing» which further transmitted into the phenomenon that is defined as «ecological criticism».

Ecocriticism as a notion firstly appeared at the end of the 1970-ies. It was *William Rueckert* who introduced the notions «ecocriticism» and «ecologic» into the everyday usage in his essay "*Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism*" (1978) where the problems of the contemporary problems of America's literatures were under study [8], and apparently lay dormant in critical vocabulary until the Western Literature Association meeting in Coeur d'Alene (1989) when *Cheryll Glotfelty* renewed the interest in these visions of the relation «human-nature» while stressing the peculiarities of forming the Image of Nature. In her reports *Glotfelty* not only brought the term «ecocriticism» to the academic sphere, but also insisted on considering this term to be «nature story studies» or even «studying fiction about nature». [5]

In 1993 on the last day of the Symposium of Western Literature Association (WLA) trouble arose at the end of a session entitled «Ecocriticism: Reimagining the Way We Write about the West», a session that, unfortunately, was left without time for discussion at the end. As people were gathering up their belongings and streaming toward the doors, an older gentleman, still in his seat, clearly befuddled, tried to raise his voice above the haste: «But what IS ecocriticism?» It seems that few people heard him but those who did recognized a voice crying out in the wilderness. Some immediately exchanged looks of: «Hey, that fellow deserves an answer – we all do!» And thus was born the idea for the session at the 1994 WLA meeting in Salt Lake City, "*Defining Ecocritical Theory and Practice*". Gathered here are one-page position papers by sixteen «younger» scholars, all of whom are pondering the question posed by the good man in Wichita: «What is ecocriticism?» Rather than provide the definitive answer, the point of these papers is to foster an awareness of the varied uses to which scholars are putting the term. In addition, the writers were asked to consider how

our present understanding might lead to future developments, both in scholarship and in pedagogy as well as use the material as a document, a point of departure to ponder the stance toward «ecocriticism». [3]

In the well-known collection of essays “*The Ecocriticism Reader*” (1996) *Glotfelty* [6] – the founder of ecological criticism – finds the origins of ecologically determined theory and its practice in the works of literary and cultural scholars in the 1970s, and further on she continues to develop ecocritical projects in the mid-1980s until their final consolidation as a recognisable critical school in the 1990s.

There exist some definitions of the notion «ecocriticism». Thus, *Glotfelty* defines ecocriticism very inclusively as «the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment» and further observes that «most ecocritical work shares a common motivation: the troubling awareness that we have reached the age of environmental limits». [5, P. XX]

Scott Slovic states that ecocriticism is considered to be «the term means either the study of nature writing by way of any scholarly approach or, conversely, the scrutiny of ecological implications and human-nature relationships in any literary text, even texts that seem oblivious of the nonhuman world». [9]

Lawrence Buell determines ecocriticism «as an academic movement and critical discourse, environmental literary and cultural studies represent a heterogeneous field in the sense that they are in general more issue-driven than methodologically-focused». [4, P. 712]

Simone Birgitt Hartmann says that «within the Anglo-American nature writing ecocriticism has limited its area of research not only to a particular genre of writing and to a specific concept of nature as wilderness but also, in terms of nationality, to narratives written by white, mid-class, male writers». [7, P. 89] Such a situation led to the fact of running the risk of neglecting «the significance of multiple natural and built environments to writers with other ethnic, national, or racial affiliations» and gendered identities. [1, P. 7] However, considering that «ecocriticism is still emerging and will continue to grow and diversify for the foreseeable future», it is necessary to widen the scope of ecocritical inquiry beyond the generic conventions of nature writing in order to account for interrelated social and environmental issues, and give voice to those excluded, disregarded standpoints and «situated knowledge». [7, P. 89]

Ecocriticism as a aspect of environment studies can be considered to be less nationalistic than any other fields researching Nature-Nation relations, dealing with the national specificity and sometimes coming to the deterministic approaches and racist theories. And even more – the current global environmental problems prevent us from speaking about any national borders. But nevertheless, it is possible as well as necessary to speak about the nature’s influence on the nations (regarding nations as «imagined communities») as well as the national identity (shaping the «Nation-as-Narration» principles). And it is the nation that affects its nature by its policies and laws while shaping the national landscape.

The contemporary Canadian literature scholars *M. Moore*, *P. D. Murphy*, *P. Banting* as well as others come to the idea that environmental and ecological concerns may feature more prominently in the public and social life in Canada today than in other countries, because environmental awareness and green politics have a strong presence in the Canadian consciousness and a long history in its cultural context which is determined as the product of a tradition in which the idealisation of natural environment and the critiques of the

technocratic society have played a key part since the formation stage of the Canadian national consciousness. *Banting* points out that the term «ecocriticism» has not been picked up to the same extent in Canada as it seems to have been in the US. However, there has been always been a considerable amount of literary criticism devoted to the discussion of the relationship between the place, land, landscape, or nature and literature. For instance, among them are the following ones such as *Northrop Frye's "The Bush Garden"* (1971), *Margaret Atwood's "Survival"* (1972), *Laurence Ricou's "Vertical Man/Horizontal World"* (1973), *Birk Sproxtor's "Trace: Prairie Writers on Writing"* (1986), *David Bentley's "The Grey Moose: Essays on the Ecologies and Mythologies of Canadian Poetry 1690-1990"* (1992), that are not totally ecocritical surveys in themselves but do include many statements in poetics which are closely related to the topics of concern to ecocriticism. These authors accepted the main notions and principles of the ecological critical theory proposed by the US ecocritics. Despite the lack of the definite methodological principles and scholastic plurality of ecocriticism (both theory and practice), it was the Anglo-American nature writing tradition that defined standards of ecocritical reading.

Many writers began to react to the sense of threat, not from, but to, the physical environment and scholars show an increasing interest in situating Anglo-American literature in an ecological context. [2, P. 11] This transformation was encouraged by the new ecocritical ideas which provoked the action of redefining the function of literary and cultural studies with respect to the environment. The dominant ideology in the history of western civilisation has conceptualised society as separate from and superior to the physical environment, but ecocriticism attempts to reconceptualise this value-hierarchical dualism of culture versus nature. Ecologically informed criticism highlights interrelationships between the two realms, ultimately leading to an understanding of natural environments and human cultures as constantly influencing and constructing each other [1, P. 4]. Therefore, an ecological approach to literary and cultural studies faces the paradox that 'nature' is both a cultural/discursive construction and a grounding/prediscursive 'reality' [7, P. 90].

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