

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Definition Eco-Criticism

The word 'Ecocritic' is a compound of the Greek terms oikos and kritos. The word kritos signifies judge, and oikos denotes house (Howarth 1996, 69). In its most literal sense, ecocriticism refers to a person or viewpoint that evaluates the qualities of a work of literature that discusses how culture affects the natural world. In literary ecocriticism, Oikos can be seen as the earth, the largest house inhabited by living beings, according to Edward Hoagland. In the meantime, Kritos is in charge of keeping the house and its belongings clean and orderly (Howarth 1996, 69).

William H. Rueckert coined the term literary ecocriticism in the 1970s with his essay, *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism* (1978). Rueckert's work emphasizes the connectedness between the text and humans, and his notion tends to regard a text as an ecosystem (Rueckert 1996, 68). Furthermore, Rueckert's idea of ecocriticism is deemed excessively narrow or constrictive because it just concentrates on the scientific features of ecology (Glottfelty 1996, xx). This is not the same as what is now known as ecocriticism, which is the theory that identifies every relationship that could exist between literary works and their natural surroundings (Glottfelty 1996, xx).

2.2 History of Eco-criticism Movement

The idea of ecocriticism initially surfaced at Western Literature Association (WLA) meetings in the late 1970s. The WLA is a group that focuses on Western literature. From an academic perspective, the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE), a professional organization that originated in America but now has sizable affiliates in the UK and Japan, dominates ecocriticism. It regularly hosts seminars and publishes a journal with essays on environmental activism and education, literary analysis, and creative writing. Romantic poetry, wilderness narrative, and nature writing were the only focus of many early ecocriticism works. However, in recent years, ASLE has shifted toward a more comprehensive cultural ecocriticism, incorporating analyses of popular scientific

writing, movies, television, architecture, artwork, and other cultural relics like malls, zoos, and theme parks.

Lawrence Buell, a well-known ecocritic, claims that there are multiple trend lines that show how ecocriticism evolved from a "first wave" to a "second" or more recent wave or waves that are becoming more and more noticeable now.

1. Ecocriticism in the First Wave

For ecocriticism of the first wave, "environment" essentially meant "natural environment." The worlds of the "natural" and the "human" appeared more disparate in practice, if not in theory, than more contemporary environmental opponents have come to believe. At first, ecocriticism was thought to be concurrent with Earthcare's objectives. Contributing to "the struggle to preserve the 'biotic community'" was its stated objective.

Generally speaking, the term "environmental" refers to the external factors that have an impact on humans and other living things. The environment is defined more broadly as everything that has an impact on an organism throughout its lifetime. All living things, including humans, have an impact on a variety of environmental factors. Concerns about science, nature, health, employment, profits, politics, ethics, and economics are all part of the human experience of environmental issues.

Writers who emphasize nature as a significant component of their subject matter, such as the American transcendentalists, the British Romantics, John Clare's poetry, Thomas Hardy's writings, and the Georgian poets of the early twentieth century, are given particular canonical attention by first-wave ecocriticism.

2. Second Wave or Newer Revisionist Waves

Ecocriticism's second or more recent revisionist waves have a stronger relationship with environmental science, particularly the biological sciences. The publication of Joseph W. Meeker in 1974 marked the first significant critical representation of the relationship between biology, the environment, and literature. In his 1999 essay *Ecocriticism and Science: Toward Consilience?*, Glen A. Love notes that a line of biological thinking has always accompanied the development of

ecocriticism and the study of literature and the environment. proof of environmental damage that has been biologically confirmed, and it was the obvious link that, as the authors stressed, could assert a lasting and significant connection to human life.

Ecocriticism can be used to critically analyze the development of environmental themes in video games, especially when considering its three main waves. Early video games, which were mostly technological in nature, provided limited expression for the first wave of ecocriticism, which highlighted the pristine environment and denounced industrialism. However, games like *Final Fantasy VII* (1997) are very much in line with the second wave of ecocriticism, which adopted a more inclusive and global perspective on environmental challenges, especially those influenced by postcolonial circumstances and corporate greed. The Shinra Electric Power Company, a fictional but symbolic representative of exploitative industrial capitalism, is responsible for ecological degradation, which is criticized throughout the game. This is consistent with the concern of second-wave ecocritics regarding the relationship between socio-political structures and environmental degradation. The story is given more emotional and visual depth with the release of *Final Fantasy VII Remake* (2020), which also incorporates a wider ecological concept. The revisionist wave of ecocriticism, which incorporates digital media, posthumanism, and speculative ecology within its purview, is reflected in this change. In addition to providing a sentimental look back, the remake presents a revisionist ecological discourse that uses sophisticated digital aesthetics to portray the devastation of planetary systems. Consequently, *Final Fantasy VII Remake* is a cultural artifact that represents the development of ecocritical themes in digital storytelling, signaling a shift in video game ecocriticism from second-wave to revisionist.

Geology is at least as significant to William Howarth as the biological sciences (Howarth 1999). Still, he seems to prefer combining the humanities and sciences in the framework of researching particular landscapes and geographical areas (Howarth 1996). In contrast, Ursula Heise has recently looked to risk theory, a subfield of practical mathematics, as a window into how literature examines the worries prevalent in modern society. Then, others have also embraced the claim that ecocriticism is becoming more scientifically educated.

Similarly, Carson's book *Silent Spring* is an excellent example. To demonstrate that DDT was present in the environment in quantities that were harmful to wildlife, Carson had to look into an ecological issue with the assistance of environmental toxicologists and wildlife biologists. However, *Silent Spring* engaged in cultural rather than scientific endeavors when it attempted to make the moral argument that it shouldn't be. The book's greatest accomplishment was transforming a (scientific) ecological issue into one that was widely accepted and subsequently disputed in the media, popular culture, politics, and the law. Thus, ecocriticism can assist in defining, investigating, and even resolving ecological problems in this broader sense, but it cannot significantly contribute to discussions about ecological concerns.

The "facts" of science are "neither real nor fabricated": the microbial revolution depended on a specific type of planned laboratory performance, without which science history would have unfolded differently, but the innovation or discovery was also genuine. To characterize this concept of the "facts" of science, Bruno Latour cleverly suggests the neologism "factish," which is a combination of the words "fact" and "fetish": "types of action that do not fall into the comminatory choice between fact and belief" (Latour 1999: 295, 306).¹⁵ Therefore, it is necessary to read the discourses of literature and science both in relation to and in opposition to one another.

According to the former perspective, the encounter in issue triggers a primordial connection between humans and nonhumans, and the archetypal human figure is a lone person. The latter holds that the "environment" is artificially created and that the ideal human figure is determined by social categorization. For better or worse, environmental entanglement defines the concept of personality in both cases. Despite having begun as a literary theory in the 1970s, eco-criticism has since expanded to include video games and other popular media. Though the fundamental concepts of eco-criticism—namely, the condemnation of environmental harm and human exploitation of nature—have permeated the worldwide cultural consciousness, game developers typically do not specifically reference eco-criticism as a theoretical basis in their creative processes. The Shinra Electric Power Company, a company that uses mako as the planet's life energy without taking into

account its ecological effects, is a portrayal of this in the Final Fantasy VII Remake. These topics are in line with eco-criticism's main goal, which is to examine the connection between literature and the natural world, according to Glotfelty (1996). As a result, even while eco-criticism is not a direct inspiration for game developers like Tetsuya Nomura, Naoki Hamaguchi, and Motomu Toriyama, their stories nevertheless address ecological issues that may be examined via this lens. As a result, eco-criticism is a useful analytical tool for analyzing the environmental messages that are sent through digital media, including video games.

2.3 Ecocriticism as Literary Criticism

Whatever its nomenclature, the majority of ecocritical activity has a similar goal. To better understand a debate that appears to be occurring, frequently partially hidden, in a wide range of cultural contexts, the ecocritic seeks to monitor environmental concepts and representations wherever they emerge. Above all, ecocriticism aims to assess texts and concepts for their coherence and applicability as solutions to environmental crises.¹⁷ The underlying assumption of all ecological critique is that human culture is interconnected with, influenced by, and connected to the physical world.¹⁸ The goal of an ecological viewpoint is to recognize the interdependence of everything, including the most seemingly distinct entities. Nothing may be buried or thrown away without repercussions.

The relationships between nature and culture—more especially, the cultural products of language and literature—are the focus of ecocriticism. As a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman; as a critical attitude, it has one foot on land and one in literature. The concept of "the world" is broadened by ecocriticism to encompass the entire ecosphere.

The American ISLE (International Studies in Literature and Environment) and its younger British counterpart, Green Letters, are the main publications of the ecocritical movement. They stand out among scholarly association journals for their combination of academic, educational, artistic, and environmentalist contributions. In order to "provide a forum for critical studies of the literary and performing arts proceeding from or addressing environmental considerations," Patrick Murphy founded ISLE in 1993. These would include the human/nature

dichotomy, ecological theory, environmentalism, and ideas about nature and how it is portrayed, among other related issues.

In contrast, ecology is concerned with a conceptual, integrated view of human and natural systems, even if these systems are seen to be open and changing at any given time or location, regardless of whether they are nominally organic or mechanical. In the meantime, the topic has a deep-rooted and perennial focus on human/nature and people/place interactions, which is implicit in certain of its classical beginnings and evident in much of its Romantic legacy. Ecological worry often centers on issues such as identification between characters and locations or a mood and a place, life and death, and the representation and relationship between people and the environment, such as whether people are a part of or apart from nature. They also focus on questions about family and community. In literary and cultural history, all of this may be summed up in terms of three key and recurring themes.

1) A rendition of pastoral. In stereotypically pastoral works, rural people, particularly shepherds, are depicted in an idealized state of simplicity and innocence that is far from the intricacies, vices, and excesses of the court or the metropolis. In contrast, rural people are shown to be cruel and ignorant. Usually, in many pieces, the main problems are informed by and driven by the transition between these states.

2) Second nature for the metropolis. Comparisons to rural life are not used; instead, alternatives are often described in terms of the joys and hardships of city life as a whole. The metropolis is regarded as an interconnected network of worlds within worlds, a complex web of cultures and subcultures, and the capital city above all else. From a distance, the city is known as a hub of individual opportunity and social mobility, "the bright city lights." However, after further familiarity and consideration, the city frequently proves to be a place of individual isolation and social alienation, blatant greed, and financial instability.

3) Dystopias and Utopias in Science Fiction. In providing depictions of fictional settings that range from utopian to dystopian, science fiction has had a particularly significant impact. "Utopia," derived from the Greek *ou-topos*, means "no place,"

which is an idealized, fictitious location. The term "dystopia" was later used to describe a terrible, imagined setting. Indeed, depending on one's perspective, the majority of utopias feature elements of dystopia.

Elaine Showalter's idea of the three developmental stages of feminist criticism is akin to Cheryl Glotfelty's equivalent of ecocriticism. The "images of nature," or how nature is portrayed in literature, constitute the first stage. However, ecocritical studies of representation are not limited to nature. The border, animals, cities, certain locations, rivers, mountains, deserts, Indians, technology, trash, and the body are some of the other subjects.

The second step is to revive nature writing, a previously underappreciated genre of nature-focused nonfiction that began in England with Gilbert White's *A Natural History of Selbourne* (1789) and spread to America through writers like Terry Tempest Williams, Mary Austin, Rachel Carson, Henry Thoreau, and many more. Nature writing is essential for educating us to appreciate nature in an increasingly urban society. Another attempt to promote ecologically conscious literature looks at popular genres and identifies authors of poetry and fiction who demonstrate ecological consciousness.

Examining the symbolic production of species is part of the third stage of ecocriticism, which is analogous work. In what ways has the human been defined in literary discourse? The dualisms that separate meaning from matter, mind from body, men from women, and humanity from nature are all examples of dualisms that are challenging in Western philosophy. A similar effort is being conducted under the hybrid term "ecofeminism," a theoretical discourse whose focus is the connection between the dominance of nature and the subjugation of women. Another theory is called "deep ecology," which examines the philosophy's extreme critique of anthropocentrism and its potential implications for literary analysis.

In the final chapter of his book from 2005, Lawrence Buell expressed his belief that "environmental criticism at the turn of the twenty-first century will also come to be looked upon as a moment that did produce a cluster of challenging intellectual work, a constellation rather than a single titanic book or figure, that established environmentality as a permanent concern for literary and other humanists and through that even more than through acts of pedagogical or activist

outreach helped instill and reinforce public concern about the fate of the earth, about the responsibility of humanity to act on that awareness, about the shame of environmental injustice, and about the importance of vision and imagination in shaping people's thoughts, lives, and policies in addition to writing words, poems, and books.

2.4 Definition Semiotic

De Saussure defined semiotics as the science that examines the relationship between the signifier and the signified. There is no logical reason for the relationship between the signified and the signifier; it is just linked. This connection is founded on "agreement" (convention) rather than personal preference (Ferdinand De Saussure 1993, 147-148). By highlighting the relationship between the text and the cultural and personal experiences of its users, as well as the relationship between the conventions in the text and the conventions that its readers experience and anticipate, Roland Barthes carried on this theme. The concept that Barthes referred to as the "order of signification" comprises connotation (the various meanings that result from cultural and individual experiences) and denotation (the literal meaning as defined by the dictionary). This is where Barthes and Saussure diverge, while Barthes continues to employ the signifier-signified word that Saussure suggested.

This paper critically examines how corporate greed and environmental degradation are shown in the Final Fantasy 7 Remake using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. Barthes, a key player in structuralism and post-structuralism, expanded on Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of signs by giving cultural texts many levels of meaning. His paradigm is particularly useful for analyzing symbolic and ideological themes found in media and popular culture.

Barthes' semiotics makes a distinction between two levels of significance: denotation and connotation.

The literal or direct meaning of a sign, or the meaning that is perceived objectively before being impacted by cultural or emotional values, is referred to as denotation in a semiotic context. Denotation is the first level of a meaning system, according to Roland Barthes (1972), when a sign is interpreted as it is, devoid of ideological content. The mako reactor in Final Fantasy VII Remake, for instance, is depicted as

a huge, smoke-emitting industrial structure. However, depending on the game's narrative and cultural setting, this meaning may take on additional connotative or mythological dimensions.

In semiotic analysis, denotation is crucial because it offers a foundation for comprehending how signs function before culture bestows a more profound meaning on them. The connotation level, which is the meaning derived from cultural associations and myths that expose hidden ideologies inside cultural representations, can be examined after the denotation stage (Barthes, 1972; Chandler, 2007).

Connotation, as used in semiotics, is the extra or implicit meaning that is affixed to a sign by cultural background, social experience, and ideology. Subjective values that emerge in society have a significant impact on connotation, which is the second layer of meaning after denotation.

Roland Barthes (1972) defined connotation as the process by which a sign is read not just literally but also in light of societal norms and cultural presumptions. For instance, depending on the context, a flag may connotatively express pride, nationalism, or even dominance and authority, while denotatively referring to a piece of colorful cloth with a specific design.

Because it shows how meaning is created, shared, and negotiated in popular culture—including media like movies, ads, and video games—connotation is crucial to semiotic research. For instance, the symbol "mako" in Final Fantasy VII Remake can be understood connotatively as a symbol of capitalism, greed, and ecological degradation in addition to denotatively representing earth energy.

The study of signs and how meaning is produced and conveyed through them is known as semiotic theory. Charles Sanders Peirce and Ferdinand de Saussure were two influential individuals who helped develop this theory. By introducing a structuralist perspective, Saussure defined a sign as consisting of two components: the signifier, which is the sign's physical form, such a word or image, and the signified, which is the mental concept it expresses. Peirce, on the other hand, distinguished three categories of signs: symbol (a sign whose meaning is founded on cultural convention), index (a sign that is directly connected to its object), and icon (a sign that resembles its object). Semiotics is a potent tool for examining

literature, television, ads, and other forms of communication because it shows how meaning is created through cultural and social rules rather than being fixed.

The semiotic theory of Ferdinand de Saussure, which sees language as a system of signals, is where the idea of the signifier first emerged. According to his paradigm, every sign is made up of the signifier and the signified, two inseparable components. The signified is the mental idea that the signifier symbolizes, whereas the signifier is the sign's physical form, such as a word, image, or sound. For instance, the signifier is the word "tree," either written or spoken, while the signified is the idea or mental picture of a tree. The distinctions between the signs in the system provide meaning rather than a direct connection to reality. This approach emphasizes how language structures—rather than the organic relationships between words and objects—are used to produce meaning. Literary theory, cultural studies, and media analysis are all still influenced by the idea of the signifier, which is central to structuralist and post-structuralist philosophy.

A key element of Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory is the signified. According to his model of the linguistic sign, a sign is made up of two inseparable components: the signified, which is the idea or mental image that the sign expresses, and the signifier, which is the form of the sign, such as a sound or written word. When someone hears the word "rose," for instance, the signifier is the word's sound pattern, and the signified is the notion or mental image of a rose—its color, shape, and symbolic connections. The relationship between signifier and signified, according to Saussure, is artificial and founded on social convention rather than a natural connection. Scholars like Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida were influenced by this concept, which established the foundation for structuralist and post-structuralist approaches in linguistics, cultural studies, and media analysis.

In his seminal work *Mythologies* (1957), Roland Barthes popularized the idea of myth in semiotic theory. According to Barthes, a myth is a system of second-order meaning. Barthes maintained that this sign might become a new signifier in a second-order system, creating a new meaning—myth—whereas the first-order system (as put out by Saussure) is composed of a signifier and a signified making a sign. Myths have ideological purposes; they normalize historical and cultural norms

and provide the impression that they are universal or common sense. An illustration of a soldier saluting a flag, for instance, could turn into a myth of patriotism or national pride that obscures the political or historical background. Barthes demonstrated how popular culture, advertising, and the media frequently use myth to convey ideological ideas, affecting public opinion and bolstering prevailing viewpoints.

Finding out how signals are utilized to convey certain meanings in society is the goal of semiotic analysis in a cultural setting. Every cultural object, from food and digital media to fashion and ads, has layers of significance beyond its literal meaning, according to Roland Barthes (1972). He proposed the idea of myth as a system of meaning that ideologizes specific cultural values and made a distinction between denotation, or literal meaning, and connotation, or cultural or ideological meaning. For example, in consumer culture, car advertisements sell not only vehicles but also lifestyles, status, and masculinity. By using semiotic analysis, cultural researchers can uncover how hidden ideologies operate in popular texts, including games, films, and social media. This approach is particularly relevant when examining the representation of corporations, technology, or the environment in video games like Final Fantasy VII Remake, where visual and narrative signs shape players' understanding of the fictional world and its values.