



ECO-CONSCIOUSNESS IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO JONATHAN SWIFT'S *GULLIVER'S TRAVEL*

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ABSTRACT

The environmental catastrophe is one of the biggest problems of current century. As one of the living things on the planet, humans must start to understand the environmental problems in their immediate surroundings. In order to increase the future generation's understanding of the current situation of the environment, it is imperative that children receive a high-quality education. The purpose of this study is to highlight how children's exposure to green literature can help them become more aware of their surroundings. This study makes an attempt to read Jonathan Swift's Novel Gulliver's Travel with an ecocritical lens. Children's Literature can be a useful tool to develop eco-consciousness among children. This study would boost children's desire to safeguard, conserve, and care for the environment in the near future.

INTRODUCTION

Children's literature has a long history, dating back to ancient times, when stories and myths were passed down orally from generation to generation. In the modern era, children's

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literature has become an important part of the publishing industry, with thousands of new books published each year. Children's literature refers to books and other literary works that are written specifically for children and young adults. These works may be written in various genres, including picture books, chapter books, middle-grade fiction, and young adult literature. Children's literature often includes themes and issues that are relevant to children's lives, such as friendship, family, adventure and identity. Children's literature is an effective tool for raising environmental awareness among young readers. Books can educate children about the natural world and the importance of preserving it for future generations. Environmental themes in children's literature can promote an understanding of the impact of human activities on the environment, the importance of conservation, and the need for sustainable development.

The “father of children's literature” is widely considered to be John Newbery, an 18th-century English publisher and bookseller who was the first to produce books specifically for children. Newbery's books were innovative in that they were designed to be both entertaining and educational, with colourful illustrations and engaging stories that appealed to young readers. His most famous works include *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* (1744) and *The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes* (1765). Newbery's contributions to children's literature helped to establish it as a distinct genre, and he paved the way for many other writers and publishers to create books for young readers. The prestigious Newbery Medal, which is awarded annually to outstanding children's books in the United States, was named in his honour.

Children's literature was completely acknowledged as a unique field of literature by the 1950s, according to Peter Hunt, and by the 1850s, children's novels had started to shift from the didactic to the recreational. Before the first books were written down and before the first stories that were truly intended for children appeared, children's literature had its origins. Due to the prevalent theological beliefs and the challenging lifestyle throughout the mediaeval era, certain childhood specialisations were not tolerated. As a result, the distinctions between children and adults were not noticed. Children simply used the adult works that appealed to them at the time because there wasn't much differentiation between the entertainments for children at the period.

Environmental awareness can be raised in different ways through children's literature. For example, picture books with colorful illustrations can introduce children to the wonders of nature and the diversity of species. Stories about endangered animals and their habitats can teach children about the importance of protecting biodiversity. Books about climate change and pollution can help children understand the impact of human activities on the environment and the need to reduce our carbon footprint.

Some well-known examples of children's literature include *The Cat in the Hat* by Dr. Seuss,



Charlotte's Web by E.B. White, "The Chronicles of Narnia" by C.S. Lewis, and Harry Potter by

J.K. Rowling. Children's literature plays an important role in developing literacy skills, imagination, and creativity in young readers, as well as providing them with entertainment and knowledge about the world around them.

Ecocriticism and Literature

Ecocriticism is a literary and cultural theory that examines the relationship between literature, culture, and the natural environment. It is an interdisciplinary field of study that emerged in the late 20th century and has since gained increasing attention in literary studies, cultural studies, and environmental studies. Ecocriticism looks at how literary works engage with environmental issues and how they shape our understanding of the natural world. It considers the ways in which literature can help us understand environmental problems, and how it can influence our attitudes and behavior towards the natural environment. It also examines how literary works can reflect and challenge cultural attitudes towards the environment.

Ecocriticism is not limited to literature, but can also be applied to other cultural forms such as film, visual art, and popular culture. It can take many different approaches, including textual analysis, historical and cultural studies, and interdisciplinary research. Some of the key concepts in ecocriticism include environmental justice, sustainability, the Anthropocene (the current geological era defined by the impact of human activities on the environment), and the idea of "nature writing" (a genre of literature that focuses on the natural world). Ecocriticism also examines the ways in which literary works can challenge cultural attitudes towards the environment and promote environmental justice. Ecocriticism also considers the ways in which literary works engage with environmental themes, such as climate change, species extinction, and environmental degradation. It examines how literature can help us better understand these issues and develop more sustainable and environmentally responsible ways of living.

One of the key ways in which ecocriticism analyzes literature is through the lens of "nature writing". Nature writing is a genre of literature that focuses on the natural world and the relationships between human beings and the environment. Ecocriticism looks at how nature writing has evolved over time and how it reflects cultural attitudes towards the environment.

Ecocriticism has become an increasingly important field of study as concerns about climate change and environmental degradation have grown. By examining how literature and culture represent and engage with environmental issues, ecocriticism can help us better understand our relationship with the natural world and develop more sustainable and environmentally responsible ways of living. Overall, ecocriticism highlights the importance of literature in



shaping our understanding of the natural world and our relationship with the environment. It promotes environmental awareness and encourages us to think critically about our impact on the planet.

Ecocritical Elements in Swift's Gulliver Travels

Gulliver's Travels is a satirical novel written by Jonathan Swift, first published in 1726. The book tells the story of Lemuel Gulliver, a ship's surgeon who travels to four different imaginary lands, each with its own unique customs and traditions. This novel talks about the human nature seen on different landscapes and how they depend on nature for their survival. Though this novel was not written with ecocritical perspective but it has description of incidences of travel through sea and the problems faced by harsh nature.

First Part of the Book

Shipwreck takes place due to storms which show the disturbance in the sea water which is related to disturbances in nature. In the first part of the book, Gulliver finds himself shipwrecked on the island of Lilliput, where the inhabitants are only six inches tall. Despite the small size of the people, their society is highly structured, and Gulliver becomes embroiled in their political conflicts. The tiny inhabitants are highly dependent on their environment for survival. They treat Gulliver with hospitality by giving him food and water. The novel emphasizes the importance of respecting even the smallest aspects of nature and the potential impact of human actions on the environment. The description of the nature around shows the connectedness of humans to nature.

Gulliver learns that there are two groups that represent the Whigs and the Tories, two political parties in England. The war between them is a satire on the conflicts that were tearing England apart at the time. However, the way that the Lilliputians destroy their forests to build ships and houses is also a commentary on the way that England was deforesting its own countryside for similar purposes. Gulliver is shipwrecked on an island inhabited by a race of tiny people called Lilliputians. During his time on the island, he observes the local flora and fauna. Here are a few examples of the descriptions of nature and animals in the first part of the book. Gulliver notes that the trees on the island are 'as tall as a spindle' and that their bark is 'smooth and gray.' He also observes that the trees are home to a variety of birds, including 'parrots, macaws, and other tropical birds.' In addition to the birds that live in the trees, Gulliver also encounters several other species of birds on the island. He describes a 'flock of wild geese, about the size of turkeys,' as well as

'large flocks of pigeons' that inhabit the cliffs. Gulliver is given a horse to ride by the Lilliputians, and he notes that the horse is "not above four inches high" and that its "mane and tail were of a proportionable size. Gulliver also observes a herd of cows on the island, which

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he describes as "not above the fourth part of an English mile in height." He notes that they are "very tame and gentle," and that the Lilliputians use them for milk and cheese.

Second Part of the Book

In the second part of Jonathan Swift's "Gulliver's Travels," Gulliver visits the land of the giants, called Brobdingnag. Here are a few examples of the depictions of nature, environment, and animals in the second part of the book. The land of Brobdingnag is described as being full of natural wonders, including 'prodigious trees' that tower over Gulliver and 'caves of amazing depth and darkness.' Gulliver also observes the countryside, which he describes as 'enchanted' with 'fields of barley, oats, and wheat' and 'meadows of clover, through which troops of knights and squires galloped.' While in Brobdingnag, Gulliver encounters a variety of giant animals, including 'cows, horses, sheep, pigs, and even cats and dogs.' He notes that even the smallest of these animals are much larger than their counterparts in England, and he marvels at their size and strength.

Gulliver is particularly fascinated by the insects he encounters in Brobdingnag. He observes 'grasshoppers, locusts, cicadas, and a thousand other insects, noting their intricate physical structures and behaviors. He also notes that these insects, which are tiny in England, are now as large as he is. Gulliver has a close encounter with a giant fish while swimming in the ocean off the coast of Brobdingnag. He describes the fish as being 'twice as big as the largest whale,' and he is nearly eaten by it before he is rescued by some passing sailors. Overall, the descriptions of nature, environment, and animals in the second part of Gulliver's Travels serve to emphasize the enormity and complexity of the natural world. The giant animals and insects in Brobdingnag are a testament to the diversity of life on Earth, and they highlight the wonder and awe that can be inspired by the natural world. At the same time, the descriptions also serve as a reminder of the power and danger of nature, as Gulliver's encounter with the giant fish illustrates.

Third Part of the Book

Gulliver visits the floating island of Laputa, where he encounters a society of intellectuals who are so lost in their own thoughts that they are oblivious to the world around them. In the final part of the book, the third part of Jonathan Swift's Gulliver's Travels, Gulliver visits several different islands, each with its own unique flora and fauna. Here are a few examples of the descriptions of nature and animals in the third part of the book. Laputa is a floating island inhabited by scientists and intellectuals. Gulliver observes that the island is surrounded by 'a great quantity of cloud' and that there are 'numerous fountains of water' on the island. He also notes that the Laputans have domesticated a type of bird called a 'flapper,' which they use to control the movements of the island. The island of Glubbdubdrib is an island



where the inhabitants have the power to raise the dead temporarily. Gulliver meets several famous historical figures, including Julius Caesar and Alexander the Great, and he also encounters a variety of exotic animals, including “elephants, lions, tigers, bears, and wolves.” Luggnagg is an island inhabited by people who have the ability to live forever. Gulliver observes several strange animals on the island, including a ‘huge creature’ called a ‘glumdalclitch,’ which is essentially a giant cow. The island Houyhnhnms is an island inhabited by a race of intelligent horses who are able to speak and reason like humans. Gulliver is fascinated by these creatures and spends much of his time observing their society and culture. He also encounters several other animals on the island, including ‘wild asses, stags, and roebucks.’

Overall, the descriptions of nature and animals in the third part of ‘Gulliver's Travels’ are meant to emphasize the vast diversity of the natural world, even in the most fantastical of settings. The islands Gulliver visits are each unique, with their own ecosystems and inhabitants, and the animals he encounters are often strange and exotic. At the same time, the descriptions also serve as a reminder of the complexity and beauty of the natural world, and the importance of respecting and protecting it.

Fourth and Final Part of the Book

Jonathan Swift's ‘Gulliver's Travels,’ Gulliver returns to human society, but he is disillusioned with it after his experiences in the previous three parts of the book. Here are a few examples of the descriptions of nature and animals in the fourth part of the book. When Gulliver returns to his home in England, he spends much of his time tending to his garden. He describes the flowers and plants in great detail, noting their colors, shapes, and scents. He also observes several animals in his garden, including ‘bees, butterflies, and birds.’ The Yahoos are a race of savage, animalistic creatures that Gulliver encounters on an island. They are described as being ‘naked, with a short woolly hair all over their bodies,’ and they are ‘extremely hardy and voracious.’ Despite their animalistic nature, however, Gulliver notes that they are ‘more harmless and inoffensive than the generality of human beings.’ The intelligent horses that Gulliver encounters in the third part of the book also appear in the fourth part, but they are no longer seen as a source of wonder and fascination. Instead, Gulliver has come to see them as the ideal society, and he contrasts their rational, peaceful way of life with the violence and corruption of human society. Overall, the descriptions of nature and animals in the fourth part of Gulliver's Travels are used to contrast the simplicity and purity of the natural world with the corruption and violence of human society. The flowers, plants, and animals in Gulliver's garden represent a kind of natural order that is in stark contrast to the chaos and disorder of the human world. Similarly, the animalistic Yahoos are contrasted with the rational and peaceful Houyhnhnms, highlighting the destructive and irrational nature of human behavior. The landscapes describe the connection of people with



their land and nature. The four parts of the book have nature , animal imagery that shows the human interest in nature and we all are indirectly connected to the natural environment.

CONCLUSION

Children's Literature foster ecoawareness and this comes to be true when one reads Gulliver's Travel .This novel travels to satirize various aspects of contemporary society, including politics, religion, science, and human nature itself. Although Gulliver's Travels was not specifically written as an environmental novel, it does contain some elements that can raise ecological awareness in children. The novel's exploration of different imaginary lands and their societies can help children understand the diversity of nature and the importance of preserving it. Additionally, the novel's satire of human nature and society can prompt children to question the impact of human activities on the environment. For example, the land of the Laputa, where intellectuals are so lost in their thoughts that they are oblivious to the world around them, can be seen as a warning against excessive focus on technology and science at the expense of nature. Overall, Gulliver's Travels which entertains children contains several ecocritical aspects, including the representation of nature, critique of anthropocentrism and scientific progress, critique of colonialism, and complex representation of animals. These elements make the novel a rich source of ecocritical analysis.

To conclude, children's literature can be a powerful tool for raising environmental awareness and promoting a sustainable future for our planet. By introducing children to the wonders of the natural world and teaching them about the importance of conservation, we can inspire the next generation to become stewards of the environment.

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