

学术前沿研究

薇拉·凯瑟的生态视野

谭晶华◎著

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前 言

生态批评在 20 世纪 90 年代成为文学研究领域的显学，它基于生态思想的基本原则，即整体的、和谐的、多样化的、相互依存的原则，重新评价和判断文学作品，旨在弘扬那些关怀自然、崇尚人与自然、人与人、人与自我和谐关系的思想。在生态批评的基础上，生态女性主义则更加注重探讨文学作品所反映的人际和社会平等公正的问题，更加关注两性之间的征服、支配与统治，指出妇女和自然受压迫的根源是男性中心主义意识并倡导相互依存和关爱的伦理。两者都致力于文明批判，试图消解人类中心主义和男性中心主义所特有的二元对立思想，建立一种新的自然观和世界观。基于生态主义和生态女性主义的思想，本文从生态批评的视角对薇拉·凯瑟的经典作品进行重新研究与阐释，并对作者具有前瞻性的生态意识进行剖析。

薇拉·凯瑟是 20 世纪前半叶美国文学史上最重要并最多产的女作家之一。长久以来，凯瑟研究可谓硕果累累；但以往对凯瑟的评价，往往只注重于“人性的治疗者”“乡土作家”“浪漫怀旧作家”“文体作家”等方面，而忽略了她的另一侧面：生态问题的忧患者和思索者以及生态作家的身份。本文运用生态批评的相关理论，从自然生态(人与自然)、社会生态(人与人)、精神生态(人与自我)和生态女性主义等角度，对凯瑟的思想和创作进行整体系统、全面深入的分析与解读，力图展示其在工业文明的喧嚣中为现代人打开的一片新天地——在与自然的契合中重建昔日的生态文明。自然在凯瑟的艺术世界里，既是外在的自然环境，也是宇宙万物内在的自然本态，更是一种宗教信仰乃至理想生命形式的象征。薇拉·凯瑟的创作别具一格、具有历久弥新的精神气韵，关键在于

其隐含着崇尚自然、敬仰生命、推崇自然本性和营造人与自然、世间万物和谐统一的诗意生存的精神家园与自然家园的现代生态意识。

海德格尔曾说：“文学艺术就是那田野中开花的树。”他借用海贝尔(J. P. Hebel)诗一般的句子，并将它一咏三叹：优秀作品的成熟不都植根于故乡的大地中吗？“我们是植物，不管我们愿意承认与否，必须从大地中成长起来，为的是能在天穹中开花结果。”诗人想说：“在真正欢乐而健朗的人类作品成长的地方，人一定能够从故乡大地的深处伸展到天穹。天穹在这里意味着，高空的自由空气，精神的敞开领域。”

凯瑟就是这样一位身植故乡大地，在天穹中结出艺术精神之果的作家。在创作中，她刻意构筑了三个以生态是否和谐为标准的“生态世界”即“伊甸园世界”“失乐园世界”和“复乐园世界”：展现了人与自然、人与人、人与自我和谐统一，充满着原始野性生命力的生态和谐的生命世界；人与自然日益疏离对立、生命力干涸、异化萎缩充满生态病症的荒原世界；以及人回归自然，重建人与人、人与自然万物平等博爱关系的“诗意栖居”的世界。诗意栖居的世界不是机械的“倒退”，不是退回原点，而是富有新的含义。“回归”实际上是端正人的生存态度，发掘人的生存智慧，调整人与自然及人与人的关系，纠正人在天地间被错置的位置。回归，同时也是人类精神的一次自我“超越”，是向着人性丰富与崇高维度的艰难攀登。在这三个世界的构建中，凯瑟不仅对人与自然亲密关系进行了不懈的、发人深省的思索，同时又糅进了性别、父权等生态女性主义者所关心的话题，为创建和谐美好社会提出了合理的设想，也为我们全方位地了解凯瑟的生态视野提供了契机。

论文共有五章构成。

第一章引言先简要介绍薇拉·凯瑟及评论界对她的研究现状，继而介绍生态批评的起源和奥尔多·利奥波特的“大地伦理”、弗·卡普拉和阿恩·奈斯的深层生态学思想以及作为生态批评另一分支的生态女性主义的基本观点和其倡导的相互依存和关爱伦理。

第二章探讨凯瑟的早期代表作《啊！拓荒者！》《我的安东尼亚》中的生态意识。从考察内在于“拓荒精神”的生态整体主义——对人类中心主义的解构以及人物在与自然相栖共生中实现自我两个层面展开，多角度地论述了凯瑟在建构“伊甸园世界”中所蕴含的尊重自然、关爱自然的反人类中心主义的生态意识。

第三章探讨凯瑟的中期代表作《迷途的女人》和《教授的住房》，凯瑟在这两部作品中对现代工业社会盛行的对自然的征服与控制、掠夺与摧残的批判；对物质主义、消费主义至上、功利主义、欲望动力论等思想

观念背后深层原因的思索；对北美印第安原住民与自然万物融为一体的向往——诠释了作家主张回归自然从而拯救心灵危机、返璞归真的生态思想。在《教授的住房》中，凯瑟对美国西南部印第安人居住遗址进行了浪漫而富有激情的描绘，处于心灵危机边缘的圣彼德教授在汤姆——自然的化身——的引领下从印第安人民“栖居”于自然的生态智慧——对生命本体的尊崇和面对宇宙生命万物的质朴与谦逊——中获取灵感，获得顿悟，重获与自然的交融；深植于自然之中的本真的自我得以回归，从而实现自我的完整及自然人性的复归。纯净圣洁的自然仿佛是照进圣彼得教授异化空虚的灵魂中的一缕希望之光，使他阴霾的心灵世界得到救赎。

第四章论述凯瑟对如何在现代工业文明和物质主义文明社会中实现“诗意的栖居”进行了合理的设想和尝试。着重探讨了凯瑟对男权中心论的解构及其对人类与自然之间和两性之间平等互补的相互性的认识。凯瑟尊重差异，倡导多样性，抓住了生态女性主义的核心策略，把建构一个以生态女性主义伦理为基础的、男女两性共存互补、人与自然融洽无间的文化作为解决生态危机和构建和谐、可持续发展社会的根本途径。《街坊罗西基》是凯瑟晚期作品中最为优秀的小说之一，是其建构关爱、平等社会的出色演绎。男主人公罗西基扬弃了作家所有作品中的人物性格特质，植根于自然、善良纯朴，富于爱心，体贴无私，融汇了男女两性的特质，是凯瑟塑造的理想的“双性同体”形象。重建天人合一、静穆古朴的乌托邦，首先是重振乌托邦精神，为干涸的乌托邦精神注入生命的活水。通过这一动人形象的塑造，凯瑟解构了男权中心论并建构了人与自然，两性之间和谐共存的生态乌托邦——诗意生存的理想家园。

最后是结论部分。论文作者认为凯瑟是一位具有生态整体主义意识和生态女性主义意识的作家，她倡导人与自然、人与人、人与自我的和谐统一，并提出要实现这样一种普遍和谐的“诗意栖居”的境界，需要消解人类中心主义和男性中心主义所特有的二元对立，建立相互依存和关爱的伦理，从而使主体与客体、“自我”和“他者”合而为一，实现“你中有我，我中有你”的互蕴共荣。

Contents

Chapter I	Introduction	1
1.1	Current Studies on Cather	1
1.2	Ecocriticism	8
1.3	Important Views to Be Adopted	10
1.4	Cather—a Green Tree Rooted in Wilderness	17
1.5	Poetic Pursuit: Willa Cather's Ecological Vision	22
Chapter II	World of Edenic Paradise	25
2.1	Ecocentrism Underlying "Pioneer Spirit"—Deconstructing Anthropocentrism	25
2.1.1	Ecocentrism vs. Anthropocentrism	25
2.1.2	Ecocentrism	26
2.1.3	Ecocentrism Underlying the Theme of "Pioneer Spirit"	27
2.2	The Self-Realization in Connection with Nature	36
2.2.1	Alexandra's Self-Realization	37
2.2.2	Antonia's Self-Realization	45
Chapter III	World of Paradise Lost	51
3.1	The Sobbing Earth and Lost Woman	54
3.2	The Disequilibrium of Spiritual Ecology	65

3.3	Uprootedness from Nature and Humanity's Alienation	73
3.4	Returning to Nature—A Redemptive Ray of Hope	83
Chapter IV	World of Paradise Regained	96
4.1	Nature, Women and Creativity—Deconstructing Androcentrism	96
4.1.1	Ecofeminism	96
4.1.2	Nature, Women and Creativity—Deconstructing Androcentrism	99
4.2	Poetic Dwelling on the Earth	109
4.2.1	Ecofeminist Spirituality—Creating a Harmonious World	109
4.2.2	Poetic Dwelling with Ecofeminist Spirituality	113
Chapter V	Conclusion	121
Bibliography		124

Chapter I

Introduction

1.1 Current Studies on Cather

Willa Cather is one of the most famous women writers in the first half of the 20th century in American literary history. In 1974, when *Sixteen Modern American Writers* was published, she was the only woman writer included in it (Middleton 19). This reminds one of the fact that in 1938 Sinclair Lewis declared that he would have voted for Willa Cather as the “greatest American novelist” (Peck 255). Her fiction has generated significant criticism and complex and detailed analyses during the last several decades, being interpreted from a wide variety of angles. Among them are her employment of allusion and imagery for particular purposes; her description of human striving for permanent values; the structural experiments and narrative point of view as used in her writings as well as the intricate connection between her work and personal life. Some critics regard her as an escapist, a nostalgist and an elegist, though they are almost unanimously positive in their appraisal of her artifice. To Lionel Trilling, Cather’s novels are “the weary response to weariness... pervaded by the air of a brooding ancient wisdom, but if we examine her mystical concern with pots and pans, it does not seem much more than an oblique defense of gentility” (“Willa Cather,” 155).

Granville Hicks, who has been the most hostile critic over the years, blames Cather in "The Case against Willa Cather," for "never once tr[ying] to see the contemporary life as it is; she sees only that it lack what the past, at least in her idealization of it had. Thus she has been barred from the task that has occupied most of the world's great artists, the expression of what is central and fundamental in her own age" (144). These criticisms are in a sense shut off from having access to the "dark continent"—the real Catherian themes of profundity and "sophistication," by being misled by Cather's effort to achieve a surface serenity and simplicity in her novels. Critics usually sum her up as "the Novelist-of-the-Pioneers-Turned-Escapist who looked back with nostalgia to a heroic lost past; and her books had an apparent simplicity and clarity that seemed not to make intellectual demands" (Middleton 19). Wallace Stevens once remarks: "She takes so much pains to conceal her sophistication that it is easy to miss her quality" (qtd. in John J. Murphy, "The Recognition of Willa Cather's Art," 2). It was not until the 1960s that critics began to recognize her "sophistication" and her "quality." Since then, there has been an enormous proliferation of Cather criticism ranging from her fascination with myth to her strong flavor of romanticism, from her concerns with female gender to her Southern heritage—characteristic pastoral motifs: "the urge to celebrate the simplicities of a natural order; the urge to idealize a golden age almost always associated with childhood; and the urge to criticize a contemporary social situation according to an earlier and purer set of standards" (MacDonald 3). A brief look of the recent of development in Cather criticism is therefore necessary and beneficial.

Myth criticism has been an important branch in Cather studies as represented by Edward and Lilian Bloom's *Willa Cather's Gift of Sympathy* (1962). Cather's three fundamental themes characterize this book: "the spirit of the frontier in both modern and ancient times; the threat to that spirit in the encroachment of materialism and selfish acquisitiveness; and the nature of the artist" (Bloom, Edward A. x).

Another example is *Willa Cather's Imagination* (1975), in which David Stouck, the author, explores "the unusual range and depth of Willa Cather's imagination", which is "in contrast with that of many of her

more flamboyant contemporaries” “always developing in terms of its emotional and intellectual needs and in the manner of its esthetic expression” (Stouck 1). Stouck classifies the modes of Cather’s works into epic, pastoral and satire and concludes that the relationship between art and life is the central theme that runs through all Cather’s fiction. In 1990s, Mary Ruth Ryder in *Willa Cather and Classical Myth* (1990) traces in detail the allusions of classical myths Cather incorporated into her works, a useful attempt at illuminating in what ways classical myth lends significance to the body of Cather’s writings. Evelyn Helmick Hively, using the theories of Vico and other philosophers and mythologists, shows similar interest in myth-related elements in Cather’s works and sees the underlying theme developments in *Sacred Fire: Willa Cather’s Novel Cycle* (1994), that Cather’s writings, “beginning with *O Pioneers!* and ending with *Shadows on the Rock*, traces a rise, maturity, and fall of the civilization of the American West, and present a new beginning in the final books” (Hively, introduction to *Willa Cather’s Novel Cycle*). Myth is a way of examining what is penumbral, not only in literature, but in the events of people’s lives. A contemplation of her work as a whole reveals a larger dimension of mythopoeic thought, forming the themes of quest, death, and rebirth, and transformation as the basis of her stories. These mythical studies greatly broadened the scope of Cather criticism and provided insight into the deep undercurrent of rich meanings behind the veil of impressive images and symbols in Cather’s fiction, which enables one to delve into the rich mine of Cather’s profundity.

The second significant branch in Cather studies is that of Cather’s romanticism, which seems always in the blood of that woman writer. “The ultimate truths are never seen through the reason, but through the imagination” (Slote 143). Bernice Slote noted in 1966 that Cather was “primarily a romantic” (Slote). In her groundbreaking work *The Voyage Perilous: Willa Cather’s Romanticism*, Susan J. Rosowski traces Cather’s heritage of romantic tradition in the context of European and American romantic classics, and draws a conclusion that romanticism is the “intellectual tradition most important to” Cather and that in her works “runs a clear pattern of romanticism” ($|x \sim x$). Rosowski’s romanticism

refers to “a historical movement that in literature began in the late eighteenth century in reaction against dehumanizing implications of the scientific world view. The essential characteristic of romanticism concerns a mode of perception by which the imagination is used in its synthesizing or creative powers to transform and give meaning to an alien or meaningless material world.” Rosowski, by tracing the pattern of romanticism through Cather’s canon, especially her novels, put forward her point that “Willa Cather early took up the romantic challenge to vindicate imaginative thought in a world threatened by materialism and pursued it with remarkable consistency throughout her career” (Rosowski x). Susan Rosowski has also commented Emersonian influence on Cather, noting that her characters are strong-minded and experience a “negation of the ego” and “transcendence of the physical self” as they move towards impersonal and universal ideals of “beauty and truth” (Rosowski 1981: 144).

Another dimension in Cather criticism is the psychological studies on her “lesbian” nature. Since Cather was first described as a lesbian writer in the 1970s, the question of her sexual orientation and its influence on her fiction has been one of the focuses of Cather studies. *Willa Cather: The Emerging Voice* (1987), written by Sharon O’Brien, is the most powerful body of criticism that deals Cather as a woman and lesbian writer. Using Nancy Chokorow’s feminist psychoanalytical theories on the relations between women and their mothers, O’Brien attempts to show “how the roles of woman writer—which Cather acknowledged—and of lesbian writer—which she attempted to hide—shaped her fiction” (Meyering xiv). O’Brien argues that Cather’s works before *O Pioneers!* are products of the conflict between Cather’s lesbian nature and the social convention that she unconsciously accepts. Her later works are her resolution of that conflict. In them Cather makes peace with her mother and accepts her place in the mother-daughter relationship and her lesbianism. Besides being too biographical, the trouble with O’Brien criticism is that she has not hard proof of Cather’s lesbianism. In fact, we can never know whether Cather shared a bedroom with Isabelle MacClung and Edith Lewis or not and much is deduced from “evidences” of her emotional experience found in her own written work, something

speculative similar to the relationship between William Shakespeare and the “dark lady.” Moreover, the validity of Cather’s letter to Louise Pound that O’Brien uses as an evidence of Cather’s lesbianism is also debatable. A rebuke of O’Brien’s thesis on Cather’s lesbianism is made by Patrick W. Shaw in *Willa Cather and the Art of Conflict: Re-visioning Her Creative Imagination* (1992). Shaw argues that Cather has never resolved her sexual ambiguity. Her fiction is “a process by which she consciously tried to mask but unconsciously struggled to reveal her homoeroticism. She was often her own mortal enemy. In that psychic war lies both the compelling tragedy and the power of her fiction” (Shaw 10).

Willa Cather’s Southern heritage has been another important dimension of Cather studies. Joyce McDonald in his *The Stuff of Our Forebears: Willa Cather’s Southern Heritage* (1998) points out: “Like most Southern writers, Cather had a strong sense of place... Her instinct was toward the regional rather than the national. Although she depicted landscapes from different parts of the nation, her deep sense of place—usually attributed to Southern writers—dominated much of her work.” For Cather, the land was “a living, breathing entity” (2). Cather “saw the country, not as pure landscape, but filled with a human significance, lighted or darkened by the play of human feelings” (3). According to Lucinda MacKethan, “southern literature frequently takes as its departure point three specifically pastoral motifs: the urge to celebrate the simplicities of a natural order; the urge to idealize a golden age almost always associated with childhood; and the urge to criticize a contemporary social situation according to an earlier and purer set of standards” (McDonald 2). Willa Cather, “at various times, incorporates all of these Southern pastoral motifs into her work, particularly her treatment of exile and alienation, are also a product of her inherent Southern sensibility” (McDonald 3). McDonald in this book also suggests that the pastoral mode serves as an antidote to an increasingly industrialized world, and the dehumanizing mechanized materialistic society. Cather, like the Southern writers of the 1920s and 1930s, “sought on the one hand to restore their past, to reify, in some ways... the pastoral myth of a harmonious agricultural society, while on the other hand simultane-

ously attempting to recover their history”(McDonald 42). “In creating the image of the past, we create ourselves”(McDonald 64). Cather’s reconstruction of a heroic pastoral past, in a sense, is an attempt to re-establish the harmonious relationship between humans and nature and among humans themselves in the agrarian society, in her emphasis on re-linking to the “artistic and spiritual roots” of their Golden past. Cather, like the Southern Agrarians, “looked to the past in an attempt to discover their future”(McDonald 70). McDonald’s insightful exploration into Cather’s Southern heritage together with the former studies of Cather’s romanticism, in a sense, ushered in the current blooming ecocriticism on Willa Cather’s works.

The profound ecological implications permeating through Cather’s works has drawn the attentions of some scholars in recent years. They have begun to turn their attention to the interaction of humanity and nature among many vivid descriptions of her prairie landscape. Thomas J. Lyon, ex-editor of *Western American Literature*, for example, asserts Cather “has living sense of the biotic community” and places her among “our greatest nature writers.” He argues “for Cather, the instinctive standard of excellence in human endeavor, the reference, is nature”, and contends that “her capacity to feel for places and for trees—for the cottonwood being cut down, for example^①—came from the same well of consciousness as her novelist’s sympathy for character”(Lyon 22).

To reexamine Cather’s writings from the perspective of ecocriticism is an optimistic trend in future Cather studies. Cather’s works emerge as environmentally conscious texts when they are read against the background of Deep Ecology, professed by Arne Naess, Fritjof Capra, Aldo Leopold and others. To put it in a simple way, Deep Ecology emphasizes that human beings represent only one strand in the intricate web of life; all forms of life have a right to continued existence; and human beings

① Referring to the widespread cutting of cottonwood trees in Nebraska to which Cather objected in a 1921 interview. She declared the cottonwood an integral part of pioneer life and therefore worthy of preservation. In 1921, Cather told the Lincoln State Journal that she had “made a plea for the preservation of the native trees...Farmers say that cottonwood draws moisture from the fields. I am not asking them to plant more, but to let stand those great trees that are so dear of the pioneers.”

must integrate ecology into their sense of identity and learn to relate intuitively and affectively to the natural world around them in order to achieve a sustainable existence as well as a well-balanced life. The 2000 International Cather Seminar entitled “Willa Cather’s Environmental Imagination” was held in June that year in Nebraska City. Seminararians include Joseph Meeker, author of *Spheres of Life*, *The Comedy of Survival*, and *Minding the Earth*; Glen A. Love, ex-president of the Western Literature Association; and Cheryll Glotfelty, professor of literature and the environment at the University of Nevada-Reno. The seminar focuses on the newly emerging field of environmental literature and provides an overview of ecocriticism. *Cather Studies*, Volume 5: *Willa Cather’s Ecological Imagination*, edited by Susan J. Rosowski, was published in 2003 by University of Nebraska Press. The sixteen essays included in the fifth volume of *Cather Studies* derive from the focus of the 2000 International Cather Seminar. By applying ecocriticism—a field that bridges the gaps between literature and science—these essays have analyzed Cather’s depiction of place with a number of approaches. Domestically, Professor Sun Hong at Renmin University has published his essay on Cather from an ecocritical perspective—“The Ecological Realm in *My Antonia*,” in which he analyzes that Antonia—the image of Earth goddess—is an epitome of the symbiosis of humanity and nature in its deconstruction of humanity/nature dualism.

However, few scholars by now have delved systematically and deeply into the theme of the total symbiosis between humanity and nature permeating the bulk of Cather’s canon; much less make a deep and systematic analysis on her ecological views. Cather’s whole body of work, from fiction set in Nebraska to her southern novels, is a reflection of her ecological aesthetics. Deeply rooted in nature with her love for every tree and flower in her world, in those works she treats relations between people and their environment most sensitively, out of her meditation upon how humans exist in nature without “desecrating” it and how they conflate themselves and merge into a whole with the natural.

This dissertation, approaching Willa Cather from an ecocritical perspective, is supposed to fill the gap in Cather studies, with regard to a whole, systematic and overall analysis and interpretations of Cather’s

canon from the aspects of natural ecology, social ecology and spiritual ecology. Cather is at home among such writers as Henry David Thoreau, Sara Orne Jewett and Robert Frost. She shares with them a profound love of the natural world and exhibits a burning curiosity about its complex processes and seeks to know them intuitively. The familial attachment to the earth and the close kinship with other forms of life Cather weaves into her literature prefigures the emergence of the concept of "Ecology" in the 1960s and anticipated much in the mood of today's world. The affectionate way that many of her characters view nature, her efforts to create a harmonious world in an increasingly materialistic world, the great foresight with which she explores in her works such important issues as the contrast of the country versus the city and the impact of industrialism and commercialism upon simple and peaceful rural life which did not receive serious concern until the fifties and the sixties of the 20th century all enable her literary creation to stand out distinctly against the background of sustainable living in an age of environmental degradation. Anyway, she has gone quite a few steps before us in thinking about the relationship between humanity and the environment and has been, so to speak, doing ecocriticism unwittingly before the genre bursts forth onto the academic scene.

1.2 Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism, broadly defined, is an emerging branch of literary criticism concerned with the textual representation of nature. As Cheryll Glotfelty claims, ecocriticism is "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty, Introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader*, xviii). In distinguishing the broader context for literary criticism, Glotfelty observes, "In most literary theory 'the world' is synonymous with society—the social sphere. Ecocriticism expands the notion of 'the world' to include the entire ecosphere" (xi). As a result, ecocriticism is a more expansive perspective, characterized by its interdisciplinarity in its combination with ecology, philosophy, ethics, anthropology, politics, etc. It provides a methodological bridge between the human and the nonhuman (xi).

Ecocriticism urges people to reexamine and reevaluate their state of existence, to concern and care the Earth—our homeland, which is being endangered, thus contributes to the future alleviation and elimination of ecological crisis. And this ecological crisis contains mainly two aspects: physical and spiritual. In alleviating and removing the physical, environmental crisis, modern humanity's spiritual crisis can also be relieved and finally dissolved.

Addressing issues concerning landscape and the environment that have been previously overlooked by the literary academia, ecocriticism focuses on the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Ecocriticism, however, has distinguished itself by the ethical stand it takes, and by its commitment to the natural world as a "subject" with intrinsic values rather than as an "object" of thematic study. Ecocriticism is not just a means of analyzing nature in literature; it implies a move toward a more biocentric world-view, an extension of ethics, a broadening of human's conception of global community to include non-human life forms and the physical environment. Ecocriticism emerges as a response to a growing worldwide environmental pressure and the need for humanistic understanding of our relationships with the natural world. It has experienced a remarkable ascent over the last thirty years or so and has assumed the look of the major critical insurgency since the early 1990s. As early as 1974, John Meeker, in *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology*, called for a careful examination of literature's role in determining the relationship between nature and humans. He challenges writers, readers and critics to ask the question whether the creation of literature is "an activity which adapts us better to the world or one which estranges us from it" (Leopold 203~204). Glen A. Love also takes literary critics to task by arguing strongly against our discipline's limited humanistic vision and our narrow anthropocentric view of what is consequential in life and urges a shift from emphasizing ego-consciousness as the distinguishing feature of great literature to a critical focus on eco-consciousness, as this approach holds the promise of a new valuation of the nonhuman world and our place in it. By reevaluating literature, especially those great nature-oriented literary texts, ecocriticism aims at transmitting such ecological values as "human account-