CDC Journal, Year 32, No. 46, December 2024, DOI: https://doi.org/10.3126/cdj.v32i46.77033
Received Date: September 25, 2024 Accepted Date: December 31, 2024

Ecocritical Consideration: Exploring the Interconnectedness of Nature and Human Experience in Graham Swift's *Tomorrow*

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Abstract

The environmental crisis is one of the most tenacious issues of the twenty-first century, and it has never been more relevant than it is right now. This subject, typically associated with the natural sciences, has made its way into literary studies as ecocriticism, which provides an intriguing perspective on how place and nature are portrayed in scholarly works. This article aims to adopt an ecocritical approach by concentrating on the portrayal of nature, nature-culture relations, and the potential for a noble perspective on the world that is, from the standpoint of the interconnectedness of nature and human experience in Graham Swift's 2007 novel Tomorrow. The nonhuman characters and the natural world are what give rise to these discussions' starting points, prompting questions about anthropocentrism, nature's voice (or lack thereof), and agency. The novel demonstrates a distinctive ecocentric orientation in literature while also challenging conventional notions of humanism and drawing attention to current environmental challenges.

Keywords*:* Anthropocentrism, ecocriticism, environmental problems, culture, civilization, nature

Introduction

This article attempts to examine how Graham Swift's *Tomorrow* depicts the problem of nature. The novel is given a new perspective by being placed inside an ecocritical framework. The depiction and significance of nature are of interest to the researcher. For example, is nature depicted as a living, breathing subject or as a lesser object? Is nature given the ability to speak? What forms does the nature-culture interaction take? The purpose of the article is to show how important nature

is to the novels and that it serves more purposes than just providing a picturesque setting or accent color.

Swift's work is distinguished by his wordplay, references, and defiance of literary standards. Swift is considered one of the most significant contemporary landscape chroniclers, and his work is notable for its deep feeling of place (Swift, Orders p. 299). Plot-wise, the book takes place in the twenty-first century and tells the tale of Paula, the protagonist, a mother of twins, as she lies awake in bed and discovers memories from the past. The story then progressively reveals the family secret.

The article makes an effort to examine the book from an ecological standpoint because the natural world is, in fact, a prominent and distinctively portrayed presence in the work. Assuming that nature plays a significant role in the story, the article's challenge is to establish how it is represented. The following will first give an ecocritical framework, and then it will investigate how nature is presented, ecological issues, and the relationships and similarities between nature and civilization as they are portrayed in the novel.

The foundation of ecocriticism is the belief that culture and nature, humans and nonhumans, are interconnected and that culture both influences and is influenced by the actual environment (Glotfelty p. xviii–xix). The persistence of location, nonhuman nature, culture's coexistence with nature, and giving voice to underrepresented facets of life are foundational ideas of environmentalist thought.

Notably, eminent ecocritic Lawrence Buell described an ecologically focused work as non-anthropocentric, citing four key characteristics: Human interest is not seen as the sole acceptable interest; the nonhuman environment exists not just as a framing device but also as a presence that starts to suggest that human history is intertwined in natural history. A distinct terminology for anthropocentrism and biocentrism has emerged in this discourse on humans and the environment, as put forth by Lawrence Buell: "humankind-first ethics" and "ecosystem-first ethics" (Buell, *Writing* p. 227), or, as put forth by Christopher Manes, "second nature" and "first nature" (Manes p. 23). Both ideas are essential to our research. Scholars in the field of ecocriticism are particularly interested in the issue of nature's agency and voice, in addition to the previously mentioned presence of nature and nonhuman interests. The question of whether nature has agency has been up for debate for years. "Nature is silent in our culture [because] the status of being a speaking subject is jealously guarded as an exclusively human prerogative," claims Christopher Manes (Manes p. 15). Therefore, nature's voice is not privileged; rather, it is typically ignored, much like the voices of minorities, women, and children have historically

been. Put another way, people often see nature as the Other, silent, and beneath them.

Another ecocritic, Scott Russell Sanders has pointed out that although we are a part of nature—we rely on the world for food, energy, and other necessities, and our bodies decompose—it has only evolved into a cerebral commonplace rather than an emotive one. Consequently, one may generalize and wonder if nature speaks at all (p. 194). If nature is typically spoken for by humans, we may argue that nature still speaks for itself, at least in a metaphorical sense, in light of the loud environmental concerns and natural disasters like tornadoes, floods, and earthquakes.

In addition, a critical position is taken regarding hierarchies, which tend to overshadow, drive nature into a secondary role, and submit it to human requirements. Ecocriticism acknowledges biocentrism—the nonhuman world as an equal subject on its own—as opposed to anthropocentrism. First, biocentrism—nature as a voice of its own—is included in attempts to transcend the nature-culture split. This takes into account the voices of birds, animals, and other natural occurrences in addition to the reality that humans are not the only species present in the world.

Therefore, nature is attempting to become a "self-articulating subject" by rising beyond the status of the marginalized Other (Oppermann, *Viewfinder* p. 4). Second, the realization that humans and nonhumans together comprise life itself transcends hierarchical connections; contextualism and interconnectedness are thus given value. In the context of Swift's book, we will now examine the dialectics of nature-culture interaction, hierarchies, biocentrism, and anthropocentrism, as well as a multiplicity of voices and topics. The presence of nature in *Tomorrow* is distinct and relevant to its visibility and vibrancy. Its importance is related to the novel's general conflict and problems, in addition to its representational quality.

This study aims to investigate the role and representation of nature in Graham Swift's *Tomorrow,* examining how the natural environment influences the characters' lives and emotions. Through an ecocritical lens, this research will analyze:

* How does Swift use natural imagery to reflect the internal states of the characters?
* In what ways do the characters interact with their natural surroundings?
* Are there underlying ecological messages or themes within the narrative?

By exploring these questions, this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of how Graham Swift's *Tomorrow* integrates ecological perspectives

into its narrative structure, thereby enriching the broader discourse on the relationship between literature and the natural world.

The primary objective of this study is to conduct an ecocritical analysis of Graham Swift's novel *Tomorrow*, with a focus on understanding the intricate relationships between nature and human experience. Specifically, the study aims to:

* explore how Swift employs natural imagery and symbolism to mirror the internal emotions and psychological states of the characters.
* investigate how characters interact with and perceive their natural surroundings, and how these interactions shape their identities and life choices.
* uncover and interpret any underlying ecological messages or themes, such as environmental change, sustainability, and the interconnectedness of all life forms.

The study is limited in analyzing Graham Swift's *Tomorrow.* Ecocritical theories are used as theoretical tools to explore the interconnectedness of nature and human experience in the novel.

Methodology

The novel *Tomorrow* is analyzed by using qualitative research methodology. It uses theories from ecocriticism to analyze the text to understand how the text engages with ecological ideas. Key theories include deep ecology, ecofeminism, and social ecology. It analyzes the dynamics between characters and their environment. By following this methodology, the article explores and articulates the ecological considerations in the novel, providing a nuanced understanding of the text's engagement with environmental themes.

Discussion and Analysis

In Graham Swift's novel *Tomorrow*, the narrative unfolds for a single night, during which the protagonist, Paula Hook, reflects on her life and prepares to reveal a significant family secret to her teenage children the next day. The setting and natural environment play crucial roles in shaping the themes and emotional undertones of the story.

Similar to this, the changing of physical environments heightens the entire struggle in *Tomorrow*. Throughout the book, rain plays a significant role in one of these struggles. The ethical orientation of the text includes human accountability to the environment; the text at least implicitly acknowledges the environment as a process rather than a constant or a given (Garrard p. 53). When Paula, the main

character, narrates her bedtime story, it's also pouring outside. "This house will be curtained and cordoned off by a veil of rain tomorrow," she observes (Swift, *Tomorrow* p. 9). Rain is therefore going to separate Paula's family secret from prying eyes. Paula's father's funeral features a similar protecting role when the woman is shielded by the rain, which is also mentioned to be preferable to bagpipe music (pp. 72, 121), emphasizing nature's fundamental existence. The personification of rain as a guardian, "pressing a finger to its lips: Sssshhhhhh..." (p. 154), is most noteworthy. It is appropriate to equate rain to an actual living entity that protects the family and the secret.

The living environment is another significant element of the book. Mike, Paula's spouse, is the editor of *The Living World*, the corresponding journal. His commitment to it and the term "living world" itself serve as metaphors for showing that nonhuman nature is just as genuine and alive as human nature. Nonetheless, Mike's intimate connection to the natural world raises the possibility of both biocentrism and the unification of humans and nonhumans. The journal's Yin-and-Yang ecosystem logo (p. 95) appears to be another representation of the unitary interrelations. Paula's admission that she and Mike never had children but the *Living World* also seems to point to the reason it's so notable. The Living World is operated out of a Bloomsbury attic (p. 93), whereas Mike does his study at Imperial Labs (p. 55). These details succinctly convey the widely held but mostly unacknowledged notion that the living world is, in many ways, more important than other variables in life. Paula's choice to undergo artificial insemination was also motivated by her belief that life itself is more essential than social relationships.

But the living world also manifests powerfully from an entirely opposite angle: that of catastrophic perishing. William Rueckert, whose dictum that "everything is connected to everything else" has even been dubbed "the First Law of Ecology," has abundantly supported the nature-culture mutuality element (Rueckert p. 108). According to Mike "more and more of its pages seem to deal with declines and depletions, not to say outright extinctions, things going wrong with nature, the harm being done to it, disasters in store" (Swift, *Tomorrow* p. 225). With so many natural disasters and pressing global concerns in the modern world, it is evident that the environment is a major worldwide concern. More precisely, Mike is concerned about "the 'just nature' books" (p. 226), which are attractively colored, animal-focused, and simple to look at. He has good reason to be concerned that treating nature like anything other than what it ends up being "heads-in-the-sand stuff" (p. 226): a thoughtless attitude that refuses to acknowledge or recognize the consequences on the environment.

The warnings are not taken from the sky, but rather the globe is in danger, as the image of the dying world already emphasizes (p. 226). Nature is, or at least ought to be, much more than mere nature; the issue itself requires serious attention. "If we are to survive, we must look outward [... to the stupendous theatre where our tiny, brief play goes on," writes ecocritic Sanders in a succinct synopsis (Sanders p. 195). Using the metaphor of the dying earth, Swift adopts an interesting position when addressing the subject of Noah's Ark. The brothers' paintings of Noah's Ark serve as the primary local lens through which the biblical tale is seen. The idea that animals must board the ark two at a time for the earth to be preserved is particularly troubling for the kids (Swift, *Tomorrow* p. 229). In addition to suggesting that the world will be saved, the biblical deluge also suggests an intriguing additional dimension at the local level. In other words, the significance of rain in the book is explained by the fact that it affects the paintings as well and that the box holding the drawings is compared to a tiny ark that is waiting for a rainy day (pp. 228, 230). Rain also saves the family life when the twins' father's true identity is discovered.

Thus, the novel makes extensive use of the concept of boundaries as conveyed by nature. Nonhuman animals, unheard voices, and the relationship between nature and civilization in Snails are among the nonhuman images that appear repeatedly in the narrative and hence gain instrumental significance. In *Tomorrow*, Mike is specifically an enthusiastic snail researcher. He is fascinated by things' peculiarities and discovers the remarkable in the seemingly insignificant every day, particularly in the natural world. By doing this, he effectively illustrates the harmonious relationships between nature and culture as well as the enjoyment of life.

But as Paula points out, nature seems to be history to today's kids: "They don't ask for the world, do they, they don't even want it" (Swift, *Tomorrow* p.81); to them, towns, rural cottages, and even the country itself seem like scenes from an antiquated picture book (p.81.). Despite this, Mike finds himself drawn to mollusks because, in his words, they are "the very composition of the world" (p. 18). Given that fossils and snail shells in general form the basis of life, Mike also points out that the South Downs, a significant location in the couple's personal history, would not exist without the shells (p.18). Paula's synopsis of Mike's area of study is especially insightful:

His special field, as you know, was mollusks, and within that special field, his special area was snails. And his special area within that special area, which he would say wasn't at all small, was the construction and significance, the whole evolutionary and ecological import, of their shells. (pp. 17–18)

The first thing that draws attention to this quotation is the manner it is presented, which is in the shape of a concentric circle or a spiral. This appears to be more than just a coincidence, as snail shells similarly spiral inward. Another distinctive feature of snails is that they carry their home—a place where nonhumans also reside—on their backs when they are in their shells. Second, the shells provide a feeling of security; Dougie, Paula's father, is reported to see his robes and power as his unbreakable shell (Swift, *Tomorrow* p. 63). Furthermore, snails and limpets—whose shells are not spirally coiled—are distinguished from adults and youngsters based on their shells (p. 18). The spiraling shells of snails are thought to represent the intricacies of adult life, whereas, in children, the spirals and issues have not yet materialized. Finally, Paula's statement that she cares more about her family's future than the future of the planet (p. 255) appears to be a reflection of the mindset that leads to individuals living in isolation and creating global ecological problems.

The fact that animals can communicate and have a strong, distinct voice is more significant than the fact that they all speak the same language. To put it another way, they speak literally rather than figuratively, coming out as distinct, living individuals who are hence even more present in their direct speech than, say, the rain of *Tomorrow*. Lastly, the novel's predominant focus on slippery creatures—which are frequently thought of as ugly mollusks—is the snail. So why has the selection of this unique concentration been made? In addition to highlighting nature—the nonhuman that is typically viewed as silent—the slipperiness appears to be symbolic of the reality that there are typically multiple alternatives rather than a single truth or vision. Paula and Mike in Swift's writing are connected to nature, although this may already be history for a different generation. Therefore, in general, the slipperiness might allude to hybridity, a rhizomatic blending of culture and nature. The shapes of the animals are also fascinating; take the spiral, cyclical construction of snail shells, for example. The protagonist's fascination with snails actually symbolizes the unification of humans and nonhumans, and the starting and finishing points coming together in a circle seem to highlight the connections between nature and culture.

The story serves as a striking comparison to human behavior by portraying the human world as being as close to the nonhuman world as possible. For example, in *Tomorrow*, Mike and Paula are greeted the day following their romantic encounter by the pearly clouds, the approving sun, and the gold deepening light (Swift, *Tomorrow* pp.29, 44, 48). Paula ponders the moment's perfection as well:

Had Mike controlled the weather? He had anticipated that the tide would be so cooperatively full before it quietly and respectfully receded, but that's just what tides do, right? That the couple's friends Linda and Judy would get up and leave

too, guests at our feast who knew when they should be leaving, and that the day would turn gold and dreamlike as the light grew darker and the tide crept further out? (p. 48)

These natural features do, in fact, emphasize the importance of this specific time for Paula and Mike and are not coincidental. Together, they are having a private moment while the tide is reported to respectfully recede as well as other individuals.

Another noteworthy instance is the marriage proposal at Craiginish, where Mike mentions marram grass growing on the dunes and makes a comparison to limpets prior to the momentous occasion. "The garden requires care from human hands. In the meantime, humans receive benefits from the garden as well" (Neupane p.37). It appears that Mike and Paula are similar to the grass, which clings to and takes root "where no other plant will, on bare and barren sand" (Swift, *Tomorrow* p. 77). Just as they are getting close to the area, they are also clinging to each other and becoming even more ingrained in each other's hearts. Furthermore, their union will be sterile, with the main family secret being their inability to conceive naturally. The grass is also noticeable because it is waving and murmuring (i.e., personifying the nonhuman world and suggesting that it is alive and actively participating at the moment), echoing the feelings and whisperings of the protagonists.

The forest's deterioration coincided with the location's disposal. Meeme in particular notes that the inhabitants of the forest are like withered, brown tree blades from the previous year; the villagers are simultaneously represented by the young green buds and the entire new life on the tree (Swift, *Tomorrow* p.195). One might further connect the human departure from the forest to that of the birds departing for the South: some depart sooner, some later. Vootele notes that he and his family are similar to owls and crows in that they remain through the winter (p. 119). After all, Leemet departs as well, and the grove keeper's deeds ruin his life. The forest's natural history is revealed by the rotting trees that fall with a crash and leave a hole in the forest, illuminating the subsequent collapse (p. 334). The misfortunes in Leemet's life are comparable to those of a bird that builds a nest high in the branches, only for the tree to collapse as it sits on its eggs. The bird takes off for another tree, tries again, deposits eggs, and incubates them. However, the day the chicken hatches, a storm breaks out and this tree breaks into pieces as well. (p. 316). Hence, the recurring picture of trees takes on symbolic meaning for the deteriorating forest while simultaneously drawing a striking connection to human history - to the destruction of Leemet's life, his home, and everything significant.

By viewing them as a whole, interconnected, and inclusive, we go beyond the comparisons between humans and nonhuman animals. Here, one could take

into consideration bioregionalism, a relatively recent issue at the place scale. The phrase, which originally appeared in US usage in the 1970s, first described a physical environment that is either rural or urban and has its own physiography, climate, watershed, animals, and plants (Buell, *Future*, pp. 83, 88). Second, according to Buell, bioregion may eventually take the place of "a nationalist vision of the globe and of interstate relations" (p. 83). It is regarded as a "terrain of consciousness" (p. 82). Critics of nation-state borders point to the biological region as a substitute for political and national boundaries. Thus, bioregion, as a terrain of consciousness, is a particular perspective on the world that sees people as part of a single, inclusive community rather than as a set of boundaries.

The terrible effects of environmental deterioration and climatic change on the earth and its people are the main theme of the novel Tomorrow. It investigates how human actions like resource depletion, pollution, and deforestation have resulted in natural disasters, food shortages, and geopolitical wars, among other catastrophic events. The novel also emphasizes how urgent it is to take action in order to lessen these impacts and stop additional environmental harm. It asks for cooperation in order to maintain and save the planet for the coming generations.

Conclusion

This article has examined Graham Swift's *Tomorrow* from an ecocritical perspective by focusing on the text's discussion of nature. In addition to serving as a setting and framing mechanism, the novel's natural surroundings are a highly valuable communication tool. *Tomorrow*'s living world and rain convey the sense of perishing and serve as a barrier and contrast to the human world, respectively, suggesting nature as a living being with a personality of its own. As a result, the work comes off as being heavily environmentally conscious, showcasing current environmental challenges as well as an ethical perspective.

The protagonist of the novel illustrates the interdependence between nature and culture through an exceptionally potent focus on nonhuman animals, snails. Swift demonstrates that the remarkable may be found in common snail shells, which are the foundation of all life. As a result, nature is portrayed in the book as a meaningful presence that conveys four key ideas: (1) the idea of a boundary; (2) the general concerns of the book (preventing loss and emptiness and preserving family life and the world); (3) conflicts and clashes (represented by the spiral shells); and (4) the relationship between nature and culture (represented by the cycle structure). Another way that nature is significant is because it operates on a different plane from human behavior and emotion.

In Graham Swift's novel *Tomorrow*, the ecocritical approach is demonstrated by the examination of how human behavior affects the environment and how nature and human life are intertwined. The novel explores the idea that what we do now can have a lasting impact on the environment and future generations. It also emphasizes the need for a more sustainable style of life and the vulnerability of the natural environment. The book also examines the idea of memory and history, arguing that the past and present are inextricably intertwined. This highlights the significance of protecting and honoring nature and can be interpreted as a metaphor for how human life is inextricably linked to the natural world. In general, *Tomorrow* serves as a reminder of the intimate relationship that exists between people and the natural world as well as the necessity of leading a more environmentally conscious and sustainable life.

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