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BA English Honours | Semester VI | ENG6CJ306

Literature and Ecology

Module 1: Ecology and Co-existence: Conceptual Foundations and Animal Agency • Comprehensive Notes

Chapter 1: Foundational Ecocriticism and Ecological Co-existence

Ecocriticism represents the interdisciplinary study of literature and the environment, examining how human culture negotiates its relationship with the non-human biosphere. Moving beyond anthropocentric narcissism—the assumption that human beings stand as the absolute center and sovereign masters of nature—ecocriticism interrogates the ethical, aesthetic, and political dimensions of planetary co-existence.

1.1 Cheryll Glotfelty: Defining Ecocriticism

In her landmark introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), Cheryll Glotfelty formally established ecocriticism as an autonomous literary discipline. Glotfelty famously defines ecocriticism as *"the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment."* Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature through the lens of gender, and Marxist criticism through the lens of class, ecocriticism applies an ecological lens, asking how nature is represented, silenced, or exploited in literary texts.

1.2 Non-Human Kinship: Kartiki Gonsalves's The Elephant Whisperers (2022)

Kartiki Gonsalves's Academy Award-winning documentary *The Elephant Whisperers* portrays the profound, inter-species bond between an indigenous Kattunayakan couple (Bomman and Bellie) and an orphaned baby elephant named Raghu in the Mudumalai National Park of the Western Ghats.

The film dismantles anthropocentric hierarchies, presenting non-human animals not as domestic chattel or circus spectacles, but as sentient kin possessing emotional depth, grief, and communicative intentionality. The documentary highlights indigenous ecological knowledge, demonstrating that true conservation requires love, physical care, and spiritual reciprocity rather than sterile fortress conservation.

1.3 Interspecies Loyalty: Pamela S. Turner's Hachiko

Pamela S. Turner's *Hachiko: A True Story of a Loyal Dog* documents the legendary true account of the Akita dog who waited at Shibuya train station in Tokyo every afternoon for ten years following his human guardian Professor Ueno's death. Turner explores how animal grief and loyalty mirror human moral virtues, compelling readers to acknowledge animal emotional interiority.

1.4 Climate Crisis and Poetic Witness: Craig Santos Perez

Indigenous Chamorro poet and ecocritical scholar Craig Santos Perez, in his collection *Love in the Time of Climate Change*, confronts Pacific island displacement, rising sea levels, and plastic ocean toxicity. Perez weaves love lyricism with scientific data, exposing how global carbon capitalism disproportionately devastates vulnerable indigenous island nations.

Advanced Critical Theory, Hermeneutics & Literary Praxis

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summary. Scholars must synthesize close reading methodologies with historical contextualization, cultural poetics, and contemporary critical theory to uncover the ideological architectures underpinning literary texts and media artifacts.

1. Hermeneutic Paradigms and Textual Mechanics

Critical inquiry into Module 1: Ecology and Co-existence: Conceptual Foundations and Animal Agency reveals how textual forms construct meaning through complex aesthetic strategies and structural choices:

- **Structuralism and Semiotic Deconstruction:** The organization of signs, tropes, and syntactical structures establishes narrative authority while simultaneously revealing internal fissures. Binary oppositions embedded within the discourse—such as center versus margin, tradition versus modernity, and subjective interiority versus objective reality—are systematically problematized through textual slippages and ambiguous signifiers.
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2. Historiographical Context and Reception Theory

Every literary text and cultural artifact is firmly situated within specific historical material conditions. Understanding Module 1: Ecology and Co-existence: Conceptual Foundations and Animal Agency requires examining how contemporaneous social movements, intellectual revolutions, and material shifts in print and digital publishing influenced textual production. Furthermore, Hans-Robert Jauss's concept of the "horizon of expectations" demonstrates that textual reception is never static; each successive generation of readers reinterprets these works through evolving ethical, philosophical, and cultural frameworks.

3. Comparative Aesthetic and Thematic Matrix

The following analytical matrix summarizes key comparative dimensions across traditional interpretive paradigms and modern critical frameworks relevant to Module 1:

Critical Dimension	Traditional / Formalist Reading	Contemporary Critical Synthesis	Pedagogic & Interpretive Significance
Authorial Intent & Authority	Privileges authorial biography, conscious artistic intention, and unified aesthetic harmony.	Applies Roland Barthes's "Death of the Author" and Foucault's "author function" to analyze cultural discourses.	Empowers reader-response hermeneutics and multi-vocal textual deconstruction.

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4. Pedagogical Synthesis and Scholarly Praxis

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