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ROOTED IN NATURE: AN ECOCRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE FLORA AND FAUNA IN THE SECRET GARDEN

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Abstract

This study explores the rich symbolism of nature, as embodied in flora and fauna, within the context of literature and art. Drawing from examples such as “The Secret Garden”, discussed into how these natural elements enhance the depth and complexity of creative works, offering a universal language that resonates across cultures. This symbolism bridges the human experience with the natural world, fostering reflection on our relationship with the environment and its broader implications. Positivism research philosophy and descriptive research design has been adopted in this study. Along with this, inductive research approach and secondary thematic data analysis has also been included in this work. This research underscores the significance of nature symbolism as a catalyst for discussions surrounding environmental awareness, ecological literacy, and the need for responsible stewardship of the planet. As a recommendation, it can be proposed incorporating discussions about nature symbolism into educational curricula to promote ecological consciousness and appreciation of the natural world among students. This study illuminates the enduring connection between humanity and nature, emphasizing the importance of preserving and nurturing the environment for future generations.

Keywords: *Nature symbolism, Flora and fauna, Literature, Art, 'The Secret Garden', Universal language*

Introduction

Background

Frances Hodgson Burnett's literary masterpiece, "The Secret Garden," has long been cherished for its enchanting portrayal of nature's transformative power. An ecocritical analysis of this novel reveals how the flora and fauna within the story are not merely decorative elements but central characters that embody deep ecological themes. The novel's setting, Misselthwaite Manor, is a microcosm of the human-nature relationship prevalent in early 20th-century England (Wang 60). The neglected garden mirrors the disconnection between humanity and the natural world, symbolizing the estrangement from our own inherent connection to nature. Mary Lennox's journey to bring the garden back to life parallels the broader environmental awakening occurring during the same period. The flora in the garden represents the resilience of nature. Neglected and forgotten, the once-thriving garden reflects the human tendency to exploit and neglect the environment. As Mary nurtures the plants, they symbolize nature's ability to rebound when given care and attention, embodying the inherent capacity for regeneration in the natural world. The fauna, including the friendly robin and the fox, serve as emissaries between the human and natural realms. These creatures convey the interdependence of all living beings and highlight the importance of harmony between humans and the environment (Richardson 190). The robin, in particular, becomes a symbol of hope, guiding Mary and Colin on their transformative journeys. Moreover, "The Secret Garden" underscores the therapeutic power of nature. Mary, Colin, and even Ben Weather staff experience personal growth and emotional healing through their interactions with the garden's flora and fauna. This theme resonates with modern ecological discourse, emphasizing the mental and emotional benefits of engaging with nature.

"The Secret Garden" is an ecological allegory, revealing the profound impacts of human-nature relationships. It encourages readers to recognize their place within the natural world, acknowledge the importance of stewardship, and appreciate the therapeutic and transformative potential of reconnecting with nature. As an enduring classic, the novel continues to inspire ecocriticism and readers alike to reflect on the vital role of flora and fauna in our lives and the potential for ecological restoration and renewal.

Rationale

The research rationale for "Rooted in Nature: An Ecocritical Analysis of the Flora and Fauna in 'The Secret Garden'" is anchored in the compelling intersection of literature and ecology. Frances Hodgson Burnett's classic novel, "The Secret Garden," provides a rich narrative canvas through which to explore the profound relationships between humans and the natural world. However, while literary analysis of this work abound, there is a notable dearth of ecocritical examinations that delve into the intricate symbiosis between the story's flora and fauna and the broader ecological themes they represent (Putri 5). This research aims to bridge this gap by offering a comprehensive ecocritical analysis of the novel's botanical and zoological elements. Moreover, the timing of this research is particularly pertinent in our contemporary context marked by increasing ecological awareness and environmental challenges. "The Secret Garden" serves as a poignant allegory for humanity's relationship with nature, making it an ideal text for eco-literary scrutiny. Through this analysis, unravel the layers of meaning

embedded within the garden's flora and fauna, emphasizing their role as agents of transformation, interconnectedness, and emotional healing.

Research aim and objectives

The main objectives of the research is

- To examine the Ecological Symbolism based on Flora and Fauna in “The Secret Garden”
- To investigate the role of the garden's flora and fauna in shaping the development of key characters
- To contextualize the ecocritical analysis of "The Secret Garden" within broader ecocritical frameworks and theories

Literature review

In Frances Hodgson Burnett's classic novel, "The Secret Garden," the flora and fauna within the story are imbued with profound ecological symbolism, serving as potent metaphors for the complex relationships between humans and the natural world. These elements of nature are not mere decorative embellishments, they represent essential themes that run throughout the narrative, hence, revealing the novel's deeper ecological message. The neglected and overgrown garden at Misselthwaite Manor stands as a microcosm of the human-nature relationship at the turn of the 20th century. Initially, the garden mirrors the disconnection and neglect prevalent in society's attitude toward the environment. It represents the consequences of exploiting and failing to nurture the natural world (Wang 120). As Mary Lennox, the young protagonist, begins to restore the garden to its former glory, it becomes a powerful symbol of the potential for ecological restoration and renewal.

The flora within the secret garden symbolizes nature's resilience and capacity for regeneration. Neglected for years, the garden's once-vibrant plant life revives under Mary's care. The blossoming roses, ivy-clad walls, and blooming wildflowers mirror the innate ability of the natural world to rebound when given attention and care. This portrayal underscores the importance of stewardship and the potential for revitalizing ecosystems even after years of neglect (Kaphle 85). The fauna in the garden, such as the friendly robin and the elusive fox, serve as intermediaries between humans and nature, highlighting the interconnectedness of all living beings. The robin, in particular, becomes a symbol of hope and guidance, leading Mary and her cousin Colin on their journeys of self-discovery and healing. This emphasizes the significance of harmonious relationships between humans and the environment and underscores the idea that fostering connections with wildlife can be transformative.

In "The Secret Garden" by Frances Hodgson Burnett, the garden's flora and fauna play a pivotal role in shaping the development of key characters, bringing about profound transformations in their lives. The characters' interactions with the natural world within the garden are emblematic of their own personal growth and emotional healing. In this transformative journey is Mary Lennox, the novel's central character. Initially depicted as a spoiled and aloof child, Mary's discovery of the secret garden becomes a catalyst for her metamorphosis. As she nurtures the garden's flora, particularly the roses, she learns about responsibility and care (Guanio et al. 150). Her connection to the natural world teaches her empathy and a sense of wonder, decisively thawing her icy demeanor and allowing her to form genuine connections with others. Mary's cousin, Colin Craven, undergoes a profound transformation through his experiences in the garden. Colin, who is initially confined to his bed due to

imagined illnesses, ventures into the garden under Mary's influence. The garden's flora and fauna become symbols of hope and vitality for him. His interactions with the natural world instill him with a newfound sense of courage and strength, dispelling his hypochondria and enabling him to walk again.

Ben Weatherstaff, the gruff gardener, is also profoundly affected by the garden's flora and fauna. Initially a man resigned to the passage of time, his connection with the robin, in particular, symbolizes his rekindled spirit and capacity for renewal. The robin's friendship breaks through his emotional barriers, offering him companionship and a sense of purpose. The garden's flora and fauna serve as catalysts for the characters' personal growth and emotional healing. Their interactions with the natural world not only facilitate self-discovery but also promote empathy, courage, and a deeper connection to one another (Wang 160). As the characters nurture and are nurtured by the garden's living elements, they undergo transformative journeys that underscore the novel's central themes of renewal, interconnectedness, and the transformative power of nature. This narrative emphasizes the profound impact that the natural world can have on the human psyche, echoing the belief that healing and growth can be found through our connection with the environment.

Frances Hodgson Burnett's "The Secret Garden" offers a rich tapestry for ecocritical analysis, as it explores the intricate relationship between humans and the natural world. This classic novel not only captures the essence of the garden as a space for transformation and healing but also resonates with broader ecocritical frameworks and theories, enriching the discourse on the intersection of literature and ecology. One prominent ecocritical framework that "The Secret Garden" aligns with is the concept of "ecological consciousness". This framework emphasizes the need for individuals to recognize their interconnectedness with the natural world and their responsibility as stewards of the environment (Asemphasah 9). Mary Lennox's journey from a self-absorbed and disconnected child to a compassionate and responsible caregiver of the garden mirrors the development of ecological consciousness. Through her interactions with the flora and fauna, Mary becomes acutely aware of her role within the ecosystem and the profound impact of her actions on the environment.

The novel also resonates with ecocriticism's exploration of the human-nature relationship. It showcases the transformative power of nature in healing emotional wounds and fostering personal growth. The garden serves as a sanctuary, offering refuge and renewal to its human caretakers. This mirrors the broader ecological concept of the reciprocal relationship between humans and nature, where nurturing the environment can lead to personal and societal well-being. "The Secret Garden" aligns with ecocritical discussions on ecofeminism. Mary, as a female protagonist, takes on a nurturing and caring role within the garden, echoing ecofeminist principles that highlight the connection between the subjugation of women and the exploitation of nature (Sayre et al). Her journey towards empowerment and self-discovery through her connection with the garden underscores the potential for women to be agents of positive change in environmental conservation. Furthermore, the novel's portrayal of the garden's revitalization aligns with ecocriticism's focus on ecological restoration. The neglected and overgrown garden represents a degraded environment, mirroring the consequences of human neglect and exploitation of nature. As Mary and her companions work to rejuvenate the garden, it serves as a metaphor for the potential for ecological restoration and renewal even in the face of environmental degradation.

Methodology

In this research study, a positivist research philosophy has adopted the exploration of ecocritical themes in Frances Hodgson Burnett's novel, "The Secret Garden." Positivism is a philosophy that emphasizes empirical observation and the scientific method to acquire knowledge. It aligns with the research objective of conducting an objective and systematic analysis of the ecological aspects within the literary work. A descriptive research design has been employed to provide a detailed account of the ecocritical elements in "The Secret Garden (McHugh)." This design allows for the thorough examination and description of the ecological symbolism within the novel, offering a comprehensive overview of how the flora and fauna contribute to the narrative's ecological themes. Descriptive research is well-suited for providing insights into the characteristics and meanings of the ecological elements present in the literary work.

The research approach for this study has chosen inductive, allowing for the development of insights and theories from the analysis of specific instances within the text. This approach is conducive to exploring and identifying ecological symbolism within the novel without preconceived notions or hypotheses. Through careful examination and interpretation of textual evidence, the research has aimed to derive broader ecological insights and themes, aligning with the inductive nature of ecocriticism, which encourages discovery within literary texts. This research primarily relies on secondary data collected from Google Scholar, a reputable academic database. Google Scholar provides access to a vast repository of scholarly articles, books, and academic papers related to ecocriticism, literature, and "The Secret Garden." This secondary data collection approach is chosen for several reasons: Google Scholar offers access to a wide range of academic sources, including articles and books written by experts in the field of ecocriticism and literary analysis (Lundberg et al. 15). This ensures that the research is based on reputable and scholarly material. Secondary data collected from Google Scholar has facilitated an extensive literature review, allowing for a thorough exploration of existing research and insights on the ecological aspects of "The Secret Garden."

The selected sources has been critically analyzed to extract relevant information and insights regarding the ecological symbolism, flora, and fauna within the novel. The research has involved comparing and contrasting various scholarly perspectives and interpretations of "The Secret Garden," enriching the analysis with diverse viewpoints and insights (Pesaro 130). Utilizing secondary data from Google Scholar, this research aims to provide a comprehensive, well-informed, and academically rigorous exploration of the ecological aspects of "The Secret Garden" from an ecocritical perspective. The data collected served as the foundation for the analysis and interpretation of the flora and fauna within the novel, shedding light on their ecological significance and the broader themes they represent in the context of literature and environmental discourse.

Discussion and findings

Theme 1: Nature as a Healing Force in relation with Flora and Fauna

Nature, particularly the flora and fauna within it, has long been recognized as a potent healing force in literature, life, and culture. In the context of “The Secret Garden”, this theme is profoundly evident. The garden itself, hidden and neglected at the outset, mirrors the emotional and physical state of its young protagonists, Mary and Colin. As they begin to care for and nurture the garden's plant life and creatures, a powerful transformation occurs. Through their interactions with the flora, such as the roses, daffodils, and other plant species, Mary and Colin not only find solace but also embark on their journey towards healing.

The garden becomes a sanctuary of renewal, where they learn about life, growth, and interconnectedness. The presence of fauna, such as the robin, adds another layer to this healing process. The bird, symbolizing life and renewal, becomes a guide, helping them unlock the secrets of the garden. Nature's healing force is not limited to “The Secret Garden”, it resonates with our collective understanding of the therapeutic power of the natural world (Wang et al. 20). Beyond the pages of literature, it reminds us that reconnecting with nature, tending to gardens, or simply spending time outdoors can be transformative, offering solace, rejuvenation, and a sense of harmony amidst life's challenges. In this context, nature, with its flora and fauna, becomes a timeless symbol of healing and renewal, offering both fictional characters and real-life individuals a path to rediscovery and well-being.

Theme 2: Ecocritical Reading as a Literary Lens

Ecocritical reading, as a literary lens, provides a valuable perspective for analyzing and understanding literature's engagement with the natural world and environmental issues. This critical approach recognizes the profound interconnectedness between human culture and the environment, emphasizing that literature is not just a reflection of society but also a potent tool for shaping environmental consciousness (Johnson et al. 10). Through ecocritical reading, literary scholars delve into texts to uncover how they depict nature, ecology, and human-nature relationships. They scrutinize the portrayal of landscapes, ecosystems, and the impact of human activities on the environment. This approach enables readers to identify ecological themes, symbols, and metaphors in literature and explore how they reflect broader environmental concerns.

Ecocritical reading prompts us to question the ethical and moral dimensions of human interactions with the environment. It challenges us to examine how literature can inspire environmental awareness, activism, and sustainable living. Scrutinizing texts through an ecocritical lens, readers gain insights into the complex web of ecological issues, fostering a deeper understanding of the environmental challenges faced today. Ecocritical reading enriches our literary analysis by highlighting the intricate relationships between literature, nature, and society. It encourages us to appreciate the role of literature in shaping our perceptions of the environment and inspires us to engage in meaningful conversations about environmental ethics, conservation, and the future of our planet.

Theme 3: Symbolism of Nature with Flora and Fauna

Nature, with its flora and fauna, has been a rich source of symbolism in literature and art throughout history. In countless works, these elements are imbued with profound meanings that resonate with human experiences and emotions. Flora, such as flowers and trees, often symbolize growth, renewal, and the cyclical nature of life. A blooming flower can signify beauty and vitality, while a withering one may represent impermanence and mortality. Trees, with their deep roots and reaching branches, can symbolize stability and aspiration. Fauna, on the other hand, carries its own symbolism. Birds, for instance, frequently symbolize freedom and transcendence, as they soar above the constraints of the earth (Wilson et al. 170). A bird's song might signify hope and communication. Meanwhile, animals such as wolves or lions may symbolize strength, courage, or even danger. In the context of literature, the specific use of flora and fauna can vary widely. In "The Secret Garden" for example, the robin represents guidance and renewal, leading Mary and Colin on a path of personal growth and healing. Understanding these symbols enhances our appreciation of the text and invites us to contemplate universal themes and human experiences through the lens of the natural world.

Discussion

The symbolism of nature, especially when expressed through flora and fauna, adds depth and complexity to literature and art. It serves as a bridge between the human experience and the natural world, allowing authors and artists to convey profound ideas and emotions. Flora and fauna often provide a universal language that transcends cultural boundaries. A blooming flower or a majestic bird can evoke similar feelings and associations in readers or viewers from different backgrounds. This universality makes these symbols powerful tools for communication and storytelling. Moreover, the use of nature symbolism invites readers and viewers to connect with the environment on a deeper level. It encourages reflection on our relationship with the natural world, sparking discussions about environmental conservation, human impact on ecosystems, and the interconnectedness of all life forms. In "The Secret Garden" the robin's symbolism, for instance, highlights the transformative power of nature and its ability to guide individuals toward self-discovery and healing.

Conclusion and recommendations

In conclusion, the symbolism of nature, conveyed through flora and fauna, plays a pivotal role in enriching literature and art. These symbols provide a universal language that resonates with readers and viewers from diverse backgrounds, enhancing the depth and complexity of creative works. Bridging the human experience with the natural world, they invite reflection on our relationship with the environment and its profound implications for our lives.

As recommendations, it can be suggested that readers and viewers continue to explore and appreciate the rich tapestry of nature symbolism in literature and art. Engaging with such works can lead to a deeper understanding of our own relationship with the environment and inspire us to become more environmentally conscious. Additionally, educators can incorporate discussions about nature symbolism into literature and art classes to encourage critical thinking and ecological literacy among students.

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