

NATURE WRITING

A general definition

“Nature-oriented literature is limited to having either nonhuman nature itself as a subject, character, or major component of the setting, or to a text that says something about human-nonhuman interaction, human philosophies about nature, or the possibility of engaging nature by means of or in spite of human culture.”

--Patrick D. Murphy

Nature writing combines aesthetic and spiritual sensitivities with scientific observation and knowledge

Nature writing involves “personal, reflective essays grounded in appreciation of the natural world and of science, but also open to the spiritual meanings and value of the physical creation.”

--John Elder

Nature writing involves “the combining of the two cultures of humanistic art and technical science into a seamless view of culture and nature interacting.”

--Gary Nabhan

Nature writing “combines rhapsody with science and connects science with rhapsody”

--Edward Hoagland

Nature writing is not simply about nature but also, and often especially, the human relationship with nature.

Thoreau’s work is “not ‘about’ plants or animals or birds . . . it is about his relation to them; one may almost say about ‘himself in connection with nature.’”

--Joseph Wood Krutch

“Observing nature, Thoreau knew, was an activity inseparable from observing himself—scrutinizing not only his mind as it perceived the world but also his language. . . .”

--Frank Stewart

Nature writing includes an ethical dimension

“Nature writing . . . accommodates natural history but *foregrounds* the construction of writers’ personae and ethos in light of *ethical judgments* about how to be and act at home (i.e., *ecologically*) in the natural world.”

--H. Lewis Ulman

Nature writing often involves a political dimension

“If all literature, all language, is values-oriented and, by extension, political, then we as readers must simply be alert to this dimension of whatever text we’re examining, whether its outward style is ‘poetic’ or ‘prosaic.’”

--Scott Slovic

“Like most of the writers I study, I experience a constant and enriching tension between what I call the ‘*epistemological*’ *dimension* of nature writing and the ‘*political*’ *dimension* of the genre. By ‘epistemology’ I mean the effort to understand the nature of the universe and the relationship between human beings – or between the human self – and the natural world. By the term ‘political,’ on the other hand, I mean the effort to persuade an audience to embrace a new set of attitudes toward the environment and, potentially, to implement these enlightened attitudes in the form of relatively nondestructive behavior.”

--Scott Slovic

“I suppose this is a conceit, but I believe this area of [nature] writing will not only one day produce a major and lasting body of American literature, but that it might also provide the foundation for a reorganization of American political thought.”

--Barry Lopez

ECOCRITICISM

The term "criticism" in literary studies means "the scholarly study and interpretation of" literature. Ecocriticism is a fairly new field in literary studies: the study of literature with a special attention to the significance of nature in literature.

Ecocriticism is literary “criticism that arises from and is oriented toward a concern with human and nonhuman interaction and interrelationship.”

--Patrick D. Murphy

Ecocriticism is "the study of nature writing by way of any scholarly approach or, conversely, the scrutiny of ecological implications and human-nature relationships in any literary text."

--Scott Slovic

Ecocriticism is, like much contemporary criticism, a form of *cultural critique*, interdisciplinary in its tools, and its intentions.

--Michael P. Cohen

Ecocritics not only interpret the meaning of nature writing texts. They also use those texts as a context for analyzing the ideology and practices of our society in relationship to nature. Often, the result is a critique of how our culture devalues and degrades the natural world.

“Ecocritics, to do something genuinely meaningful, must offer readers a broader, deeper, and more explicit explanation of how and what environmental literature communicates than the writers themselves, immersed in their particularized narratives, can offer. Crucial to the ecocritical process of pulling things (ideas, texts, authors) together and putting them in perspective is our awareness of who and where we are. Our awareness, literally, of where we stand in the world and why we're writing.”

--Scott Slovic