

## THE ROLE OF NATURE IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY DIALOGUE

Davi Silva Gonçalves<sup>1</sup>  
Eliana de Souza Ávila<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to analyse how the dialogue between literature and the environment might actively interfere in society's behaviour concerning the ecological problems in vogue today. In this sense, the bibliographical research is structured on hypotheses which problematise dominant systems in the contemporary intellectual, social, and economic spheres, highlighting ecocriticism as a pivotal theoretical perspective for the relation between subject and surrounding space to be rethought. Bringing the Amazon as to materially illustrate the importance for such theme to be discussed, the article proposes alternatives external to the ones posed by developmentalist policies, whose worries generally regard material profit reached through the alienation of the population so convinced of the benefits of such process. Such process, thus, takes place through the institutionalisation of Amerindian's culture, their insertion in the capitalist world, and, especially, the obliteration of Amazonian environment and the extinction of native species. Going to the opposite direction, literature might be utilised as a counter-hegemonic tool able to allow readers to consider other definitions for their relation with the environment.

**Keywords:** Ecocriticism. Nature. Literature. Society. Sustainability.

### 1 "In the Landscape of Capitalism": Nature and Us

David Harvey, one of the most cited authors in the humanities, has very strong opinions against global capitalism, which he criticises through several analyses regarding mainly neo-imperialist enterprises. His writing, therefore, is permeated by a sense of social and political justice, and, when addressing those issues, the environment is a topic in which he seems to be particularly interested. Even though

<sup>1</sup> Doutorando na área de Processos de Retextualização, linha de pesquisa: Teoria, Crítica e História da Tradução, do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Estudos da Tradução. Mestre na área de Teoria e Crítica Literária e Cultural do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Língua Inglesa ambos na Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Florianópolis, SC, Brasil. E-mail: [goncalves.davi@hotmail.com](mailto:goncalves.davi@hotmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Doutorado em Inglês/Literatura pela Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina. Professora adjunta no Programa de Pós-Graduação em Inglês da Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Florianópolis, SC, Brasil. E-mail: [elavila.ufsc@gmail.com](mailto:elavila.ufsc@gmail.com)



he has never called himself an actual “ecocritic” that does not mean he is not; he surely has much to contribute to the field, and the fact that he is not “labeled” does not affect the ecocritical plausibility of his arguments. Here I rely more specifically on these arguments as found in two chapters from two different books that he has written, both focusing on nature and/or on human relationship with nature.

In “Responsibilities Towards Nature and Human Nature”, from one of his most well-known books *Spaces of Hope* (2000), Harvey’s view is that, even though hegemony addresses ecological matters as if everything which is required for us to solve current environmental issues is a more cautious approach towards nature while the west “grows” (that is, we just need to develop “more carefully”), western capitalist and expansionist system is bound to fail in that attempt due to the self-destructive character that defines this system in the first place; for human relationship with nature to be effectively rethought Western structural projects—mainly the ones related to its notions of progress and development—cannot be applied less harmfully, they need to be completely deconstructed and reconceptualised.

In the words of the theorist, the environment “is now an open and critical focus of discussion and debate among the capitalists and their allies—many of whom are obsessed with the issue of long-term sustainability” (HARVEY, 2000, p. 213). Harvey admits, thus, that people have been concerned about our relationship with nature—which has already proved to be far from healthy—but he nonetheless does not believe that talking about it from the same Imperialist perspective, which has accompanied us throughout history, is quite enough.

Trying to “change” capitalism for it to become less damaging to nature is impossible; if everything is seen through the lens of profit how can anything be preserved? This is why Harvey believes that this “long-term sustainability”—so fashionable in the contemporaneity—is nothing but utopian if the structural flaws of the system are not amended; a money-centred society—exactly what we are—is essentially the antagonist of a sustainable one.

One of these structural flaws of the capitalist system is the anthropocentrism it entails; some of us have actually been convinced that we should not worry so much about how the west has altered the environment because the environment has always gone through modifications, that there have been ice ages and fire ages so the weather has always been naturally unstable just as it is today, that forests are

useless and buildings are necessary, etc.—so we can basically do what we want no matter the consequences.

This is all an attempt to withdraw human responsibility to deal with the problems we have created, but Harvey warns us that, notwithstanding the fact that other communities and even animals might have disrupted nature's functioning in one way or another, notwithstanding the fact that the weather is indeed unstable, no one has had so much impact on the planet as western culture has; it is, then, our responsibility to engage in reflections that address the issue as a whole: "we are now obliged—by our own 'achievements'—to work out in the imagination as well as through discursive debates our individual and collective responsibilities" (HARVEY, 2000, p. 213).

Even though other species work for their own survival to be guaranteed, humans must, from now on, look for answers "not only to ourselves and to each other but also to all those other 'others' that comprise what we usually refer to as 'external' nature—'external,' that is, to us" (HARVEY, 2000, p. 213). Here the researcher problematises the idea of an internal and external nature (human nature and nature in general), suggesting that boundaries separating those realms are much more cultural than indeed natural.

Although Harvey strongly criticises the destructive historical record of Western contact with nature, this conclusion is pretty Marxist; that is, his argument is that the ability we have to be detrimental to nature can be balanced with the one we have to be positive to it (what we used to harm nature would be used to try and help its preservation, such as communism would be the "fair" use of capitalist triumphs after its dethronement). It is obvious today that human beings can change the world, the point now is how and why to do it less egocentrically: "we have accumulated massive powers to transform the world, and the way we exercise those powers is fundamental" (HARVEY, 2000, p. 213).

Criticising the basic tenets of neoliberalism, Harvey believes that, for us to exercise these powers "we have accumulated", Western imaginary needs new ways of experiencing nature; if the ideological structure of the system is not changed, then nature will still be deemed as a romanticised space that can be either controlled or saved by our human supposed wisdom. Ecological discussions, no matter how trendy or recurring they are, are generally much more complex than we think

inasmuch as they are generally, and specially in what concerns western culture, fairly dependent on an influential sociopolitical and economic bias.

Hegemonic worries are ultimately comprised only by problems that affect hegemonic purposes. As a result marginalised populations are not seen as participants in this process, at least no as “active” participants since what the system needs is their passivity. Seen by hegemony as part of the problem, and not the solution, how the margin is affected by the environmental impacts of Western “development” is not a problem at all, and it does not deserve attention:

Matters are far from simple. To begin with, the definition of ‘environmental issues’ often entails a particular bias, with those that affect the poor, the marginalised, and the working classes frequently being ignored [...]. [E]nvironmental global impacts frequently have a social bias – class, racial, and gender discriminations are evident in, say, the location of toxic waste sites and the global impacts of resource depletion or environmental degradation. [...] Finally, the distinction between the production/prevention of risks and the capitalistic bias towards consumption/commodification of cures has significance (HARVEY, 2000, p. 221).

Therefore, everyone whose “class, race, and gender” deviate from the main patterns devised by hegemony can and must be ignored for the system to thrive. Normativity does not deem them intellectually capable of knowing more about nature than hegemony does. Indeed native communities are generally much more unaware—and this is not a synonym for insouciant—of how human beings can be detrimental to nature; however, their way of life has “naturally” been permeated by a balance that our hegemonic culture can never reach as long as our commodification and commercialisation of nature is not stopped.

Harvey poses that, for the Western tradition, “commodifying everything and subjecting almost all transactions—including those connected to the production of knowledge—to the singular logic of commercial profitability and the cost-benefit calculus is a dominant way of thinking” (HARVEY, 2000, p. 222). Such “dominant way of thinking” is a hindrance for other logics to be devised and put into practice since everything that does not aim at generating profit is hampered by the “cost-benefit calculus”.

Western thinking should, in Harvey’s view, overcome this cost-benefit calculus that it does every time it addresses a problem. The importance of nature has nothing

to do with its profitability; on the contrary, this calculus will always result in more destruction and destitution; the marginalised lives will always change for worse as long as the calculus is done since “the production of our environmental difficulties, both for the marginalised and the impoverished [...] is consequential upon this hegemonic class project, its market-based philosophy and modes of thinking that attach thereto” (HARVEY, 2000, p. 222).

Environmental degradation is, therefore, the natural result of this “hegemonic class project”; a project that must not be remodeled, but completely abandoned and started from scratch. Concerning that matter Harvey has a very ecocritical opinion when it goes to how a distinct project could be devised anew; the author sees in literature a very good opportunity to address ecological matters as to make the reader evade hegemonic thinking.

However, concerning the traditional literary approach on nature, he criticises the alienation of readers through books that discuss the human “self” as if it were isolated from nature and/or from the “Others”. Harvey (2000, p. 223) poses that much of the literature of our time has been dominated by the quest to understand the inner self and to understand even whole symbolic systems in terms of their inner meanings, “but the quest to understand inner meanings is inevitably connected to the need to understand relations with others.”

In the anthropologist’s view, literature should provide us with bridges to see how the world is interconnected, and not make us even more anthropocentric; therefore, simply saying that “literature about nature” would be the solution for environmental issues is ingenuous, since one can write about nature as if from the outside, ignoring human connections with it—or overemphasising natives’ connection with it, what might be even worse. This, in his view, is a tendency of Western tradition; to narrow down our focus to the inner meanings of isolated things—as if in locked boxes—such as humans and the environment. This is due to a contemporary Western illusion that convinces us the more we narrow down our focus the best we can see. Harvey makes it clear that the meanings of both nature and human cannot be understood without taking into account the interactive relationship that exists among such things.

Ultimately, Environmental matters are much more connected to our daily lives than we are prepared to accept. Nevertheless, contemporary romanticism towards

nature has provided us with a “Utopian environmentalism” that sugarcoats our detrimental use of natural resources. The reason is simple, in order not to face the poignant reality Western tradition has generated, we have created an artificial—however pleasant—cosy milieu that reminds us of a nature we do not think is “needed” any longer; and that has made it difficult for us to try and look beyond “the landscape of capitalism”:

Many residues of a utopian environmentalism can be detected in the landscape of capitalism [...]. Our collective responsibilities to human nature and to nature need to be connected in a far more dynamic and co-evolutionary way across a variety of spatiotemporal scales. [...] We can all seek to be architects of our fates by exercising our will to create. But no architect is ever exempt from the contingencies and constraints of existing conditions and no architect can ever hope, except in that realm of pure fantasy that does not matter, to so control the web of life as to be free of ‘the contingent and unsought results’ which flow from their actions (HARVEY, 2000, pp. 231-232).

## **2 That Place We Call “Home”: The Spatial Optimisation of The Land**

In the chapter “Creative Destruction on The Land”, from the book *The Enigma of Capital and The Crisis of Capitalism* (2010), Harvey’s main arguments are articulated specially taken the fact that he deems Western worry with nature hypocritical. The author does that by describing how the Imperial notion of development is controversial, although it still thrives. He starts the chapter with a very witty paragraph summarising the two-facedness, which has encompassed Western relationship with nature; being such nature on one hand obliterated and on the other romanticised by hegemony at the very same time:

Whole mountains are cut in half as minerals are extracted, quarries scar landscapes, waste flows into streams, rivers and oceans, topsoil erodes and hundreds of square miles of forests and scrubland are eradicated accidentally as a result of human action, while the Amazonian rainforest burns as the cattle ranchers and the soybean producers hungrily but illegally gobble up the land just as the Chinese government announces a vast programme of reforestation. But the British love to walk in their misty countryside and admire their heritage of country houses, the Welsh love their valleys, the Scots their glens, the Irish their emerald green bogs, the Germans their forests, the French their distinctive ‘pays’ with their local wines and cheeses (HARVEY, 2010, p. 184).

In this excerpt Harvey shows his readers that, at the same time we destroy and change our milieu—“while the Amazonian rainforest burns”, we are able to lie to ourselves by pretending our society is being able to live balancing human lives with environmental preservation—while our “government announces a vast programme of reforestation”. In order to illustrate his view that Western tradition is essentially anthropocentric he compares our culture with the ones of some marginalised peoples, who seem to understand their connection with the land to be much less hierarchical than we seem to think of ours: “[t]he Apache believe that wisdom sits in places, and indigenous groups everywhere, from Amazonia to British Columbia and the mountains of Taiwan, celebrate their long-standing and unbreakable bond with the land wherein they dwell” (HARVEY, 2010, p. 184).

The fact that western tradition lacks this “bond with the land” that such communities have been able to foster is undeniable. Moreover, even after we have experienced the consequences of our acts, Harvey suggests, our behaviour is still as or more damaging, even if euphemistically rearranged: “[o]ver the last three centuries marked by the rise of capitalism, the rate and spread of destruction on the land has increased enormously [...]. We are more circumspect now in our rhetoric, though not necessarily in our practices” (HARVEY, 2010, p. 185).

The theorist’s arguments, here, seem to be contradicting the popular notion that the process of commercialisation and profiteering necessarily result in improvements and advancements for people—the notion that “the rise of capitalism” has a higher purpose. In his view Western development does not benefit the people or the land—let alone marginalised peoples and lands—being inserted by the process, but only commercial interests.

Everywhere the capitalist system reaches, things do not seem to get better, they actually get pretty worse. Instead of richness money, paradoxically, is proved to provide the maintenance of poverty for the marginalised populations that are welcomed to development. Profit is indeed of paramount importance, people’s needs, however, are not: “the geographic landscape of capital is perpetually evolving, largely under the impulsion of the speculative needs of further accumulation and only secondarily in relation to the needs of people” (HARVEY, 2010, p. 185).

Harvey problematises the idea that developed settings are, by definition, unarguably more cosey than “pristine” ones; when the idea is making money, and

making people spend, living comfortably is something that must never be achieved. That is, a developed world is a world wherein no one becomes satiated, and the optimised spaces created to embalm neoliberalism are, therefore, the opposite of the comfort that only nature, the one we have been dismissing, can help us construct. Place-making, particularly around that place we call “home”, is considered by the theorist an art that belongs largely to the people and not to capital: “The deeper meanings that people assign to their relationship to the land, to place, home and the practices of dwelling are perpetually at odds with the crass commercialisms of land and property markets” (HARVEY, 2010, p. 192).

In this excerpt, Harvey reminds us that our sense of “home” depends on “the people and not on the capital”; and, after doing that, when the professor tells his readers to ask themselves the question: “are our cities designed for people or for profits” (HARVEY, 2010, p. 193) he is actually asking us to remember what the system made us forget: what the simple but basic characteristics that one shall seek when pondering upon a plausible space to live in are. Developed places, places where Western progress has been able to thrive, are not designed for us to live; they are designed for us to work.

We do not need profitable places or relationships in order to be deemed spatially and temporally meaningful; our spatial and temporal configuration doesn't need to be profitable in order to be comfortable. Ultimately, comfort can only be achieved by humanity—whose lives tend to focus on an ultimate happiness that is never accomplished due to the pathologic functioning of our capitalist structure—if we stop believing that money is the answer for every question. Nevertheless, the system is able to effectively sell the idea that it is through market that happiness, the feeling of living a satisfying life, can be effectively achieved, although in fact it takes us to the opposing corner:

Regional configurations are, in short, made by the conjoining of economic and political forces rather than dictated by so-called natural advantages. Their making inevitably involves a regional co-evolution of technological and organisational forms, social relations, relations to nature, production systems, ways of life and mental conceptions of the world [...]. The state emerges as the geographical container and to some degree as the guardian of those arrangements. But the state that emerges operates like a fixed net of administration cast over the ferment of capitalist activity [...] (HARVEY, 2010, p. 196).



There are no “naturally advantageous” spaces for one to be, these are generally economically advantageous for the market and the state, which seems to be always benefiting neoliberal interests, even though such interests go, controversially, completely against the whole reason for the state to be: “[t]he neoliberal movement [...] constitutes a radical ideological assault upon what the state should be about” (HARVEY, 2010, p. 197). What Harvey means is that global spaces are generally measured by their economic strength, by their ability to profit, and this is not necessarily what the state should be doing for us.

Hegemonically, for every place to become better it must first become richer since it is richness what forms the basis of our notion of space. This is how Western thinking has learned to regard nature: solely as a resource for human greedy needs. The “success” of a particular state is often measured by the degree to which it captures flows of capital and builds the conditions favourable to further capital accumulation within its borders. “The more capital accumulation can be captured within its borders, the richer the state becomes” (HARVEY, 2010, p. 197).

This is why development is so important; the more commoditised a region is, the more “successful” it is regarded. One of the main tenets of neoliberalism for supporting such development in marginalised regions—located in the margin for not being sufficiently connected to the “globalised” world—is the democracy such processes are supposed to entail. Such argument is put into question by Harvey, who shows that the freedom of the market does not necessarily imply the freedom of people at all.

In the words of the professor the combination of authoritarian state powers with limited democratic rights but considerable free market individualism in economically successful countries “suggests that there is no necessary relationship [...] between strong capital accumulation and individual democratic rights” (HARVEY, 2010, p. 199). Even in countries where the state is not considered authoritarian, the economy generally is; and, in these cases, even though superficially an illusion of freedom might be delineated by the neoliberal system, when one looks at it less perfunctory, it proves to be superficial at best.

Moreover, the “authoritarian state powers” and the “democratic rights”, which Harvey discusses about, are matters that have been repeatedly modulated and re-modulated as for invasions in lands that do not yet belong to hegemony to keep

happening, no matter the historical period we are in. Through an analysis of colonisations and neocolonisations, he emphasises that imperial conquests have taken place chiefly through violent raids while neo-imperial ones have happened mainly through negotiated accesses to a certain milieu. But, at least for him, both the former and the latter are, essentially, colonial possessions: “[c]olonial possessions [...] can involve violent conquests and colonial occupations [...]. But they can also be established more peacefully through negotiated access, trade agreements, and/or commercial and market integrations [...]” (HARVEY, 2010, p. 205).

In the neoliberal world it is obviously the former that mostly takes place; that is, the relations of power imposed by imperialism have clearly not been surpassed in our contemporary—and neo-imperial—world, but only redesigned by a new discursive and performative regime; in the end we are still being colonised. Harvey demonstrates fairly clearly that, no matter how much money flows in a city, those who need help will never be given any access to the developmental assets so merchandised by development.

The only ones who benefit from Western progress are rich investors, since the purpose of neoliberalism being inserted in previously non-developed places is “to redistribute wealth and redirect capital flows to the benefit of the imperialist or hegemonic power at the expense of everyone else” (HARVEY, 2010, p. 207). Though what seems to be a discursive and procedural juggling, capitalism debar natives from their own land, and finally imposes a new way of life in a brand new space—that was once theirs—wherein they would never be able to leave the margin wherein they have been placed; having been taken their own space, the west makes the invaded start feeling as if they were the invaders. Cruel, but effective.

### **3 “One Foot in Literature and The Other on Land”: “For a More Encompassing Ecocriticism”**

“Through literature, ecocriticism can go beyond connecting readers with nature and analyze what constitutes those connections” (CAMPBELL, 2010, p. 19). Andrea Campbell, in the article “Reading Beyond a Universal Nature: Hopes for the Future of Ecocriticism” (2010), poses that “since its formal inception in the 1990s, the field of ecocriticism has experienced dramatic growth and dramatic changes” (CAMPBELL,

2010, p. 1); and this graduate growth of Ecocriticism, followed by its conceptual evolution, is essential for contemporary beliefs that disregard the connection human/nature to be evaded, possibly, retransformed. The task is not an easy one, and surely “the twenty-first century looks to be a time of excitement and challenge for ecocriticism” (CAMPBELL, 2010, p. 1).

In her view Ecocriticism must be taken from its romantic origins and readapted in a more interdisciplinary and wide-ranging fashion; becoming, then, able to envelop broader discussions and, consequently, generate “a more encompassing Ecocriticism” (CAMPBELL, 2010, p. 2). She seems to find it fairly problematic to think of postmodernism in universal terms since, when it goes to marginalised regions, this does not seem to be applicable: “postmodernism/poststructuralism, had alienated readers from their natural surroundings, creating a sense of apathy towards environmental issues” (CAMPBELL, 2010, p. 1). Campbell highlights that this is not only her personal view on the matter since for the field itself, as a result of this alienation, the recognition of increasing environmental devastation in the late twentieth century “and the simultaneous popularity of postmodernism alarmed early ecocritics, who saw postmodern theory’s dismissal of the “real” as complicit in the destruction of nature” (CAMPBELL, 2010, p. 2).

Besides, hegemonic views on postmodernism imply a mobility and detachment from time and space that are, controversially, hardly given to marginalised peoples. Even though, her point does not seem to be to discredit postmodernity as a whole, since “a more fluid definition of nature allows ecocriticism to incorporate more points of view and reach a larger audience” (CAMPBELL, 2010, p. 16). She acknowledges, therefore, the positive effects of postmodernism inasmuch as it “significantly affected ecocriticism, which had relied so heavily on the idea of nature as a stable, unchanging realm [...]” (CAMPBELL, 2010, p. 15).

However, her intention is to convince her readers that, notwithstanding postmodern breakthroughs, such term cannot be understood noncritically: “[w]hile I do not agree with the dismissal of postmodernism/postmodern literature altogether, I do believe that we need to question certain postmodern views [...]” (CAMPBELL, 2010, p. 4). Her point is that, due to postmodern “fluidity”, the contemporary moment has mistakenly been promoting “a widening gap between people and their environment, both in fiction and reality” (CAMPBELL, 2010, p. 2).

Concerning this “widening gap” in fiction, Campbell has a very strong and critical view on novels, poems, and etc. which highlight the supposed superiority of the human mind without taking into account the space that is occupied by such humans: “fiction that never looks beyond the human realm is profoundly false, and therefore pathological. No matter how urban our experience, no matter how oblivious we may be toward nature, we are nonetheless animals” (CAMPBELL, 2010, p. 3). Ecocriticism would be, then, a very effective approach to dodge such inaccuracy since its main feature encompasses “the desire to make the environment more central to literary discussions, to reconnect readers with nature, and to downplay the importance of strictly theoretical discourse, all in the hopes of combating environmental destruction” (CAMPBELL, 2010, p. 4).

For a better understanding of the historical articulation of Ecocriticism since its first conception, and its growing interest in “reconnecting readers with nature”, the author proposes the division of the field into what she calls its first and second waves; being the former that ecocriticism which has an extremely categorical and romanticised view on nature, and the latter an ecocritical approach encompassed by much broader conceptualisations: “for first-wave ecocritics, true nature is a space apart, away from large populations”, but second-wave ecocritics problematise this “traditional ‘natural’ settings—forests, fields, deserts, mountains, rivers”, and question this “rejection of other landscapes, including the urban” (CAMPBELL, 2010, p. 7).

Second-wave ecocritics believe that imposing such boundaries for the field is contrary to its purposes inasmuch as, by doing that, “first-wave ecocriticism actually defeats its own goal of reconnecting readers with nature” (CAMPBELL, 2010, p. 7). That is, if the first wave restrains and delimits intellectual thinking regarding the environment, the second one goes to the opposite direction, adapting postmodern trends to the field in order to problematise the idea of a “pristine land”, the essentialist notion of nature as a “return to the past”.

In Campbell’s view, the notions which initially used to scaffold ecocriticism would make it fairly difficult to think of this theoretical approach, as it once was, in contemporary times; this is because while other fields began addressing the issue of globalization, the emphasis on place “kept ecocriticism in the local, unable to conceive of the global [...and that...] has provided us with no sense of place of the whole Earth in contemporary culture” (CAMPBELL, 2010, p. 7). It would, therefore,

be fairly hard to depend exclusively on the local—without taking into account its interaction with other locals—in a period wherein globalisation has become virtually omniscient.

Campbell believes that, for us to be given some of this “sense of place”, “race, class, gender, and sexuality are important issues for the future of ecocriticism [...]” (CAMPBELL, 2010, p. 16). The possibility of interdisciplinarity as an interesting path, which also comes during this second-wave of ecocritical thinking—since the first was comprised mainly by “personal narratives about nature produced from privileged positions of gender, class, and ethnicity” (CAMPBELL, 2010, p. 8)—, is addressed; in Campbell’s view pondering upon the land as connected to other margins, as connected to marginalised peoples, allows the field to finally connect social justice with environmental issues. She poses that “[p]erhaps what has been most troubling for critics of first-wave ecocriticism is its lack of engagement with issues of race, gender, class, and sexuality” (CAMPBELL, 2010, p. 7); ignoring people who have been marginalised by hegemony, ecocriticism has endorsed and promoted “a false sense of separation between social justice and environmental issues” (CAMPBELL, 2010, p. 8).

Separating people and the land wherein they live generates an “idealisation of nature”; so it is essential for Ecocriticism to avoid focusing “on glorifying the ‘natural’ world in hopes that aesthetic appreciation would change people’s attitudes” (CAMPBELL, 2010, p. 9) by discussing the environment as more than innocuous landscapes inasmuch as “environmental issues (such as polluted air and water, toxic work environments, and hazardous living conditions) are tied directly to matters of personal liberation and empowerment” (CAMPBELL, 2010, p. 17). Nature is not something to be appreciated in leisure times, it is materially and meaningfully ubiquitous in human life as a whole, strongly affecting and interacting with not only human observations but, more importantly, human existence:

[C]ombating environmental destruction is directly linked to the fight for personal, social, political, and economic agency. This is another reason for not only recognizing people as part of landscapes, but also analyzing how this affects different communities and cultures. For second-wave ecocriticism, the issue of “personal liberation and empowerment” and the environment opens the door to literature with urban centered plots and to questions concerning literary constructions of environmental racism. First-wave ecocriticism defeated its own goal of connecting readers with the environment by only focusing on one version of nature. Here, this move

helps ecocriticism achieve its original goals. It gives ecocriticism more material and steers the field away from the “universal” nature comprised of mainly white men, allowing a variety of readers to recognize their realities within a broader genre of environmental literature (CAMPBELL, 2010, p. 18).

Therefore, drawing a parallel between marginalised peoples—who fight for their “personal and social agency”—and land, “blurring the boundaries between self and nature”, does not result in a deviation from the main tenets of ecocriticism; it only puts into question what the author calls the idea of a “faceless environment”: “where it is only nature that suffers from harmful effects” (CAMPBELL, 2010, p. 18) of development. The unpleasant outcomes of environmental destruction does not affect only the land but also everyone else living in it, and “focusing upon texts that incorporate racial, ethnic, class, and sexual difference, and/or that emphasize intersections between social oppressions and environmental issues” (CAMPBELL, 2010, p. 12) would be a pivotal step for Ecocriticism not to be deemed “faceless” any longer.

Campbell concludes that “ecocriticism can indeed become a major branch of literary criticism and can be used to analyze all sorts of writings, but in order for this to happen, the field must grow and evolve beyond the limited view of nature set forth by early practitioners” (CAMPBELL, 2010, p. 9-10). For, if it does, one of the most gainful results would be that “[u]niversal’ views of nature would also be disrupted” (CAMPBELL, 2010, p. 14). Human connection with the land is, indeed, much more intricate and diverse than the romantic first wave of ecocritics have suggested; when one looks at the environment, this observation does not need to be nostalgic, it does not need to be surrounded by lost images of an unachievable past. Nature is materially meaningful in our present and will surely also be in our future; that has never been a choice.

#### **4 “Ways of Getting in Touch with The World”: “The Nature of Representation and The Representation of Nature”**

Dana Philips, in the article “Ecocriticism, Literary Theory, and the Truth of Ecology” (1999), suggests that the success of Ecocriticism lies in its ability to tamper with former careless portraits of nature and of human relationship with it:

“ecocriticism is a new variety of critical thinking which opposes the blasé attitude toward the natural world predominant in literary studies” (PHILLIPS, 1999, p. 578).

However, as the author notes, ecocriticism’ focus on nature has generated severe criticism by those who discredit what they consider the “spatial limits” of the theory, posing that it entails some sort of backward theorising for going against the main courses of academia. According to the author ecocritics run the risk of getting lumped with the neoconservatives, but they claim to be speaking, however, “not on behalf of tradition, of which they are often critical, but on behalf of nature [...and...] their interest in the natural world can be actually quite volatile, even radical [...]” (PHILLIPS, 1999, p. 578).

She makes it clear, thus, that this is not the case whatsoever; ecocriticism’ attention on space and nature does not necessarily imply that it would be unable to come up with nontraditional and counter-hegemonic considerations. On the contrary, ecocriticism has much in common with poststructuralism and postmodernism; the constructedness of nature is also a basic tenet of postmodernism, poststructuralism, and other forms of theory “sharing the same feeling of belatedness and the common conviction that representation is ‘always already inadequate’” (PHILLIPS, 1999, p. 578).

Nevertheless, even though it provides ideological enrichment regarding human relation with nature, ecocriticism does also share other characteristics with more traditional academic thinking, such as realism, for evading some theoretical conundrums as it attempts to study and understand material things; it wants readers to think of the world, but also to touch it. Ecocriticism marks a return to activism and social responsibility. “From a literary aspect, it marks a reengagement with realism, with ‘the actual universe’ of rocks, trees, and rivers that lies behind the wilderness of signs. This description is effusive, but accurate” (PHILLIPS, 1999, p. 579). That is, ecocriticism does not discredit theory, but its sociopolitical load aims at bridging academic thinking with material actions concerning environmental matters.

The researcher suggests that, as a result of this dialogism between realist and postmodern features, the field is not devoid of contradictory views at all; actually there are numberless ecocritics with opposing views in what regards nature; the analysis of human relationship with nature does not follow the same path for every ecocritic, and romanticising the environment is something that, even though some

ecocritics dismiss, many others have been doing. The greatest struggle for the field is not against distinct fields which are opposed to Ecocriticism, but actually inside Ecocriticism itself; ultimately, ecocritics enemies are generally closer than they think: “there are more weeds growing in their own gardens than ecocritics have supposed” (PHILLIPS, 1999, p. 579).

However, in Phillips view the greatest asset of ecocriticism, regardless of its contradictory existence, is the theoretical holism it implies. If one thinks of analysing nature through clearly separated steps, the possibility of an accurate result becomes much foggier than it would if the whole had been considered. The science of ecology confirms the indivisibility of natural processes, “each feature of a landscape must be understood with reference to the whole, just as the habits of each creature reflect, and depend upon, the community of life around it” (PHILLIPS, 1999, p. 581). Nature does not constitute itself isolatedly; the interdependence and interaction between the parts is unavoidable, and taking that into account is of paramount importance for the theory to make sense.

Notwithstanding how simple this makes the definition of ecocriticism look like, it is not; analysing literary approaches on nature is as complex as analysing any other literary approach: “ecological realities are not necessarily more obvious than literary values, and they may be—probably are—much less so most of the time” (PHILLIPS, 1999, p. 582). To discuss about the environment one must be effectively intellectually engaged with notions related to ecological matters; appreciating nature per se does not mean one is prepared to talk about it. In Phillips words good intentions and a receptive attitude while out hiking or canoeing do not enable one to make ecological judgements: “Enjoying a good read does not make one a literary critic. It should follow, then, that enjoying a good read about hiking or canoeing and sharing one’s enthusiasm in lecture or print does not make one an ecocritic” (PHILLIPS, 1999, p. 582).

Phillips is strongly against such idyllic and innocuous appreciation of nature “as nothing more than projective fantasy or social allegory”, and she criticises its construction as a paradisiacal realm, or an illustration of human feelings; according to the researcher a less anthropocentric view on the matter is required: “one can treat literary texts not as detractions from but as contributions to our interaction with the natural world” (PHILLIPS, 1999, p. 584); ecocritical writing must not aim at giving



readers an escape from the material world, but at giving them tools to face up to such world as much “more than ‘an ideological screen’” (PHILLIPS, 1999, p. 584).

She also suggests that for the field to become indeed more than this “ideological screen” it would be profitable to engage in dialogues with other theoretical areas, which can function as ideological resources for it to enrich its revolutionary features. Ecocriticism needs a rationale that will enable it to use the “resources” of literary theory “while retaining some respect for the force of theory’s premises, for it is surely the case that the premises of theory are its resources” (PHILLIPS, 1999, p. 585).

There must be “respect for the force” of these resources; when dealing with environmental matters one must be careful not to overvalue practice and underrate theory. Ecocritical thinking must not dismiss theory; on the contrary, it should make the most of it. Besides, if Ecocriticism is unable to become open for theoretical resources regarding marginalised realms other than nature “the result can only be a middlebrow literature of nature informed only by middle-class values, and too much contemporary nature writing is like that already” (PHILLIPS, 1999, p. 587).

Bearing in mind the revolutionary potential of the field, it would be revolting to see it representing hegemony. In fact, one of the outcomes of overcoming the narrowness that one single view on matters entails is that ecocriticism would be able to disorder the hegemonic chronology of environmental temporal and spatial articulations. Regarding this issue, the researcher says that it is pivotal for ecocriticism to provide some kind of temporal disruption concerning how the connection humans/environment is generally addressed; the idea of a return to a time “when things were better” must be evaded since such perspective not only emphasises the misguided notion that nature is something which belongs to the past—far from being the case—but also that there is nothing we can do for the environment from now on besides thinking nostalgically about it:

[S]ome ecocritics, and many environmentalists, imagine that to think ecologically and environmentally is to recover the habits of thought of some era in the past before the disruption of the human and natural worlds by a heedless agriculture, a runaway industrialism, the loss of faith, the discovery of relativity, the embrace of modernism, and the advent of the postmodern [...]. But to imagine that the solution for the environmental crisis involves a return to the past—awakening from the metropolitan dream—ignores the fact that our understanding of the environment has come about through the disruption of nature by agriculture and industrialism and the concomitant rise

of science. Without environmental crisis, in other words, there might be no “environmental imagination” [...]. There is considerable irony in the fact that in order to begin to understand nature, we had first to alter it for worse (PHILLIPS, 1999, p. 598).

The environment is not meaningful only when one is lost in reverie; environmental issues are materially relevant, and perhaps much more connected to our present and future than to our past—actually even those categories (past, present, future) can be easily problematised. Philips’ argument that the environmental crisis has been the first step for us to look for environmental solutions is fairly plausible; after all, if nature had not been so much impacted by human carelessness, indeed one could never have realised how high the level of such impact has been. The fact that we had to be so detrimental to nature in order to understand it is indeed “considerably ironical”, but that may explain our past actions. For our present and future, however, there is no excuse.

## 5 “No Time is More Urgent than Now”: “The Future of The Amazon”

Gomides and Vogel, in the book *‘Amazonia in the Arts:’ Ecocriticism versus the Economics of Deforestation* (2007), emphasise the importance of thinking ecocritically about the Amazon, whose rates of deforestation “are surpassing historic records” (GOMIDES; VOGEL, 2007, p. 2). Problematising Western notions of development in the region and criticising the never-ending habit of hegemony to impose its will everywhere it gets, the researchers work on “the theme of accepting the Amazon on its terms” (GOMIDES; VOGEL, 2007, p. 56).

They believe one of the most important questions of contemporaneity is if the Amazon “can pass through the bottleneck of ‘economic development’ without deforestation” (GOMIDES; VOGEL, 2007, p. vi). Focusing on an ecocritical analysis of the Amazonian space, what they think is special about the region is the fact that “[n]o matter what zoning laws are now imposed in upstate New York, the original wilderness will never return; fortunately, this is not yet the case in the Amazon” (GOMIDES; VOGEL, 2007, p. vi).

Defining ecocriticism as “the field of enquiry that analyzes and promotes works of art which raise moral questions about human interactions with nature” (GOMIDES; VOGEL, 2007, p. 7), they believe that, when pondering upon ecological matters, one

need not be restrained to the scientific realm. Their argument is that sometimes it is art, and not science, that might achieve the contemporary population more effectively. Verisimilitude is necessary to find solutions but it is almost never sufficient to motivate action; “indeed, if it were, the existing documentaries and scientific texts [...] would suffice [...]. In other words, we believe that art is more effective than science in penetrating the political sphere and motivating action” (GOMIDES; VOGEL, 2007, p. 4). Here they confess their definition of art is not that original, since “the idea of art as an agent of social change is as old as art itself” (GOMIDES; VOGEL, 2007, p. 8).

To sustain their view on the difficulties faced by Ecocriticism in a period when hegemony turns a blind eye to most environmental issues, the authors draw an interesting parallel between slavery and Amazonian deforestation, showing that “the logic of slavery and that of deforestation are identical” (GOMIDES; VOGEL, 2007, p. 32). The arguments which were once used to justify slavery are akin to those applied today to justify the “development” of the region—they say that anyone who looks carefully at the dichotomy slavery/environment are “struck by their similarity” (GOMIDES; VOGEL, 2007, p. 23). According to the authors, to find the common origin, one must recognize that slavery was an unethical expression of capitalism—money embodied in human flesh. “This same point can now be made about Amazonian deforestation. It continues because there is money in it, and the homology manifests itself in the complicity of today’s consumers” (GOMIDES; VOGEL, 2007, p. 22).

One of the most obvious reasons for the criticism against the preservation of the Amazon is, therefore, the economic profitability of the region’s “insertion” in the globalised world. If this is the case, then the basic premises for slavery and deforestation to take place are indeed the same: a vast area which is not being obliterated by the West is understood as a waste of resources, just like a native who is not enslaved would be. Likewise, when people benefited by environmental destruction and people benefited by slavery are both confronted with the possibility of pondering upon their actions, they simply prefer to ignore it. They pose that any deep reflection about slavery is profoundly disturbing when one’s ancestors were slaveholders; however, “deforestation is similarly disturbing, especially when one’s

country is either the biggest deforester in the world or the biggest financier of that deforestation” (GOMIDES; VOGEL, 2007, p. 153-154).

Nevertheless, the decision to deforest, like that of emancipation, cannot be argued on the basis of (mis)calculated costs and benefits. “Deforestation like slavery is a moral question and [...] is no more germane to the issue of land use than is the material welfare of a slave germane to the issue of human liberty” (GOMIDES; VOGEL, 2007, p. 28-29). The Amazon, like the slaves, is not there for one to make profit out of it; in the opinion of the authors we must learn to look at the land as we learned—some of us—to look at people, given their connection, as meaningful and not financially negotiable. If “the crux of the abolitionist literature is that slaves were not capital” (GOMIDES; VOGEL, 2007, p. 31), then the crux of ecocritical literature is that nature is not capital.

Gomides and Vogel suggest, though, that one should raise awareness not to romanticise this figure of this “native” or ex-slave, who is compared to the land, as an environmentalist. In their view “[i]t would be over-romantic, indeed plain wrong, to suggest that all these ‘forest peoples’, in addition to their other virtues, are archetypical conservationists” (GOMIDES; VOGEL, 2007, p. 100). Historically, several communities have made use of the Amazonian resources, this is a human feature rather than specifically Western; but an important difference imposed by the advent of the West has been the scale of that use. Native peoples have exploited the Amazon for millennia and without mass extinction. Their numbers were small and their economy mostly extractive and nomadic. “It is only since the mid twentieth century that highways have portended collapse as habitats are converted pell-mell for pasture, crops, dams and so on” (GOMIDES; VOGEL, 2007, p. 32).

This “collapse” is explainable since, for the typical hegemonic way of life to be sustained, a disproportionate devastation of the land is required; the self-destructive character of capitalism entails an abusive and obnoxious annihilation of the place wherein it is introduced. In the Amazon, this thirst for “developing” has been leaving us with a very alarming picture: “[t]he rain forests of the Amazon basin are disappearing at the rate of 5000 acres a day. Four million Indians lived here; 120,000 remain” (GOMIDES; VOGEL, 2007, p. 118). However, such picture is not essentially meant to make us even more dispassionate about Amazonian future picture inasmuch as we know now that “Amazonian deforestation, like slavery, is not pre-

ordained by God” (GOMIDES; VOGEL, 2007, p. 154). Therefore “the sheer scale of the horror” entailed by both processes “is no cause for hopelessness” (GOMIDES; VOGEL, 2007, p. 154); on the contrary, deforestation–like slavery–should trigger our resistance.

Nevertheless, notwithstanding these numbers, “there still are rainforests in other places in the Amazon which have not yet been fragmented by highways and torched by colonists” (GOMIDES; VOGEL, 2007, p. 136). This dual existence of the Amazon–half of it “savage” and half of it “civilised”–has resulted in distinct times and spaces existing in close proximity to one another; that is, the chronological narrow line for developing regions is problematised by the fact that the Amazon is immersed in a time and space which no longer fits in those acknowledged by hegemony.

According to the researchers, for the Amazon time never dies, since there–just like everywhere else–the past “is not even past” (GOMIDES; VOGEL, 2007, p. 51); in the region the lines which divide “past” and “present” are evidently tricky, and the temporal and spatial turmoil it entails is symbolically represented by the fluidity of its rivers: “the River Negro literally divides the ‘developed’ and ‘undeveloped’ worlds. Although the rainforest is visible, it is indeed a world away” (GOMIDES; VOGEL, 2007, p. 107). Therefore, ecocriticism, in the authors’ view, is a pivotal theoretical ground for people to rethink hegemonic concepts such as this division between “‘developed’ and ‘underdeveloped’ worlds”.

Of paramount importance for such division to be finally discredited ecocriticism can penetrate to the human, responsive, emotional core of an apparently hard and impersonal system; “the struggle of the environmentalist, thus, becomes an effort to reach that center, to fight through the outer layers, and touch the system’s heart” (GOMIDES; VOGEL, 2007, p. 144). Problematising the destruction of the Amazon before it happens might shed some light on possible distinct paths for the region; its past don’t need to be forgotten for its future to exist; it is not the Amazon that must be changed, but the developmentalist thinking of Western tradition as imposed there.

Gomides and Vogel see in Ecocriticism the chance of establishing other signifying systems rather than this tradition, since it allows marginalised regions and peoples, such as the Amazon and Amazonians, to be taken from the temporal and spatial seclusions where they were left to be placed in the spotlight. It is easy for one to talk about the Amazon, but listening to it is a bit more challenging. In fact if the

“few tribes” who “have never been in contact with the ‘outside’ world”, were listened to, we would be surprised to see what “they still know [...that...] we have forgotten” (GOMIDES; VOGEL, 2007, p. 118).

The possible contribution of these communities for a much more technological, advanced, developed society might not convince some readers; but no matter how wise hegemonic society is supposed to be, its main tenets depend on the alienation of its participants in the neoliberal enterprises of contemporaneity; ignorance is a tool for hegemonic success, and there are actually “many ‘couch potatoes’ [...who...] would be surprised to learn that the word ‘Amazon’ is not always followed by the suffix ‘.com’” (GOMIDES; VOGEL, 2007, p. 118).

Notwithstanding how important ecocriticism is for these “couch potatoes”, Gomides and Vogel believe that its survival depends on its interdisciplinarity: “what gives us hope is identity politics. Women, religious and racial minorities, GLBTs, the disabled, and the list can go on and on have all suffered tremendous injustices and, nevertheless, made headway toward full equality through identity politics” (GOMIDES; VOGEL, 2007, p. 151). What they suggest is that other theoretical approaches, which bring forward the voice of a marginalised people—such as postcolonialism and queer theory—, are intimately interconnected with the groundbreaking preoccupation with the status of the land; and that they might, therefore, enhance its range, strength, and potential.

Ultimately, marginalised spaces and marginalised people both suffer the impositions of a normative hegemony; this has always happened and, in the Amazon, both the land and the population suffer the consequences of that: “we have never heard a TV evangelist exhort his congregation to stop the ecocide that ravages the planet. On the contrary, many facilitate it by telethons for missionary work in places like the Amazon” (GOMIDES; VOGEL, 2007, p. 153). And the reason why such “ecocides” are so frequently facilitated is that what the development of the Amazon implies go much beyond financial matters; actually, everywhere Western “progress” is imposed, “[t]he transformation of the economy is accompanied by an even more accelerated transformation of the culture” (GOMIDES; VOGEL, 2007, p. 130).

This “more accelerated transformation” of Amazonian culture is undeniable, and the researchers consider it a hopeful statistic that 42 indigenous communities

have not suffered contact with the West yet, inasmuch as that allowed their culture to survive: “[t]hey are not yet clothed in orange overalls, not yet rocking to The Everly Brothers, and not yet titillated by the charms of Salomé” (GOMIDES; VOGEL, 2007, p.136). In their view, once Amazonian roads most often entail the development of nearby regions, the brightest future for the survival of both indigenous communities and forests is distance from a highway (e.g., Northwestern corner of the country in the state of Amazonas).

For such “bright future” to become achievable, the cultural and financial “contributions” of the West must not be forced in the region. By now, some of Amazonian environment and population is still able to thrive; but the reason has not been consideration for the matters addressed by ecocriticism, far from that, this lack of contact is not because foreign investors and Brazilian officials have embraced human rights, “rather, it is because the Amazon is so vast that ‘economic development’ has not yet reached all the way into the interior. But it’s coming fast” (GOMIDES; VOGEL, 2007, p. 136).

One of the outcomes of this “economic development”, once it gets in the Amazon, is the graduate multiplication of brothels in the region. The existence of these numberless brothels gives Gomides and Vogel the opportunity to elaborate even further on their comparison between slavery and deforestation, suggesting that economic development not only ignores the marginalisation of Amazonian population but actually accepts it as a little price to pay for the “benefits” of neoliberalism. “[T]he attempt of hegemony to assign value to that which is intrinsically incommensurable” (GOMIDES; VOGEL, 2007, p. 61) can and does make it endorse the obliteration of nature and degradation of people, whose bodies are subjected to extreme humiliation and minds are corrupted by its intransigent tradition:

On an emotional level, the brothel is an “absolute must” for any ecocritical package. The horror of being forced into prostitution strikes [...] sympathy and outrage in audiences. Again, a parallel can be found in the abolitionist literature [...]. The female Slaves cannot be otherwise than degraded. Subjected at all times to the passions of the whites, chastity and refinement are out of the question. They are stripped entirely naked to be punished [...]. Only think of a Woman, entirely naked, surrounded by a profane vulgar crowd, while she writhes under the Lash, or is offered, for purposes of Prostitution, to the highest bidder! Such is the “Christianizing influences’ of which Northern Drs. Of Divinity so loudly boast.’ Just as forced prostitution is the inevitable consequence of slavery, so it is with mega-projects in the Amazon. In other words, the Brazilian government turns a blind eye and

tolerates the atrocity as the price for “economic development” (GOMIDES; VOGEL, 2007, p. 115-116).

The “christianising influences” highlighted by the researchers stand not only for the physical interference of the West in the region but also for the ideological one—again we see how the transformation of economy is followed by the transformation of the culture. Notions concerning work/leisure, for instance, are strongly altered when the christianisation of marginalised Amazonians begins to take place. When Christianity is inserted in the Amazon, it impinges upon peoples who believe that “[t]here is no dichotomy between work and leisure, and nothing even that separates the spiritual from the worldly” (GOMIDES; VOGEL, 2007, p. 95).

This is the opposite of the Christian tradition, whose basic axiom is “the ideology that work is moral and the absence of work, immoral”. Christianity must be looked at not as the salvation for the Amazonian margin, but as its condemnation, inasmuch as it attacks the very tenet of Amazonians harmonic relationship with their space: “just as Christianity reinforces the work/leisure dichotomy (the Sabbath being the day of rest), Amazonian animism reinforces a holistic relationship among all activities” (GOMIDES; VOGEL, 2007, p. 94). It is this “holistic relationship among all activities” that we are lacking, and that lack is essential for the maintenance of such an anthropocentric religion as Christianity and of such an anthropocentric economy as capitalism.

What is implied by the authors’ parallel comparing slaves and the Amazon, which scaffolds most of their thesis, is the fact that, just like one person cannot “belong” to another, so cannot the land; the Amazon is a source of meaning, and not of profit; people must, thus, learn how to evade the capitalist universal—though erroneous—assumption that “everything has a price”. For Western neoliberalism, everything will always have a price since we will never be satiated with material goods. If we did how would the well-off ever achieve status? It is a conundrum most people never solve, try as they will.

The capitalist system cannot sustain itself, and the Westernisation of the Amazon aims at convincing Amazonians that they need what everyone else needs: bigger and more expensive cars, bigger and more expensive houses, bigger and more expensive everything (except electronics which goes in the opposite direction—



smaller and cheaper). The marginalised Amazonians must be convinced that all of that is fundamental, but this does not mean they will ever be able to have such things, since they are being welcomed to a system wherein “[t]rue status can only be had when a limit naturally exists over the possibilities of attaining it” (GOMIDES; VOGEL, 2007, p. 142).

Perhaps Ecocriticism can indeed bridge humans and nature once again, and finding allies for such combat seems pivotal for the field insomuch as, due to the advent of an ever-growing technological society, our unarguable connection to nature is something Western thinking repeatedly tries to forget—and without ecocritical reflections, their success becomes imminent. Moreover, understanding human existence to be inevitably connected to nature, a proven fact, is now our obligation; if when slavery takes place “everyone who did not fight against it was an accomplice” (GOMIDES; VOGEL, 2007, p. 22), then we are all going to be guilty of allowing the devastation of the Amazon once it is “completed”; after all “[i]f you’re not part of the solution, you’re part of the problem” (GOMIDES; VOGEL, 2007, p. 137). I do not want to carry that weight. Do you?



## O PAPEL DA NATUREZA NA LITERATURA CONTEMPORÂNEA: UM DIÁLOGO INTERDISCIPLINAR

### Resumo

O intuito deste artigo é o de analisar como o diálogo entre literatura e meio ambiente pode interferir ativamente no comportamento da sociedade frente aos problemas ecológicos hoje tão discutidos. Nesse sentido, a pesquisa de caráter bibliográfico conta com hipóteses que problematizam muitos dos sistemas dominantes dentro das esferas intelectuais, sociais e econômicas na contemporaneidade, destacando a ecocrítica como perspectiva teórica fundamental para que se repense a nossa relação com o espaço que nos cerca. Utilizando a região Amazônica como forma de ilustrar materialmente a importância de que se discuta este tema, o artigo propõe que se busquem alternativas externas àquelas que a política desenvolvimentista prega, já que esta se preocupa apenas com lucro material conquistado através da alienação da população que acaba sendo convencida dos benefícios de tal processo. Este processo, logo, conta com a institucionalização da cultura de populações indígenas, com sua inserção no mundo capitalista, e, principalmente, com a obliteração do meio ambiente e extinção de espécies nativas. Apontando na direção contrária, conclui-se que a literatura pode se apresentar como uma ferramenta contra-hegemônica capaz de permitir que os leitores considerem outras formas de se definir e relacionar com a natureza.

**Palavras-Chave:** Ecocrítica. Natureza. Literatura. Sociedade. Sustentabilidade.

## EL PAPEL DE LA NATURALEZA EN LA LITERATURA CONTEMPORÁNEA: UN DIÁLOGO INTERDISCIPLINAR

### Resumen

El propósito de este artículo es analizar cómo el dialogo entre la literatura y el medio ambiente puede interferir activamente en el comportamiento de la sociedad frente a los problemas ecológicos hoy tan discutidos. En consecuencia, esta investigación de carácter bibliográfico propone hipótesis que problematizan muchos de los sistemas dominantes dentro de las esferas intelectuales, sociales y económicas en la contemporaneidad, destacando la ecocrítica como perspectiva teórica fundamental para repensar nuestra relación con el espacio que nos rodea. Utilizando la Amazonia como una forma de ilustrar la importancia de que se discuta este asunto, el artículo propone buscar alternativas fuera de las políticas desarrollistas, ya que esta sólo se preocupa con beneficios materiales adquiridos a través de la alienación de la población que acaba siendo convencida de los beneficios de tal proceso. Este proceso, entonces, cuenta con la institucionalización de la cultura de los pueblos indígenas, con su integración en el mundo capitalista, y sobre todo con la destrucción del medio ambiente y la extinción de las especies nativas de la Amazonia. Apuntando en la dirección opuesta, se concluye que la literatura es una herramienta contra-hegemónica capaz de permitir a los lectores considerar otras formas de definir y relacionarse con la naturaleza.

**Palabras Clave:** Ecocrítica. Naturaleza. Literatura. Sociedad. Sostenibilidad.

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