

## AN ECO-CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF ECOLOGICAL NARRATIVES IN BILLY COLLINS' "DANCING WORDS"

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Received: 11 November, 2023 Revised: 15 December, 2023 Accepted: 25 December, 2023 Published: 10 January, 2024

### ABSTRACT

The objective of this research paper is to provide an outstanding path-breaking eco-critical assessment using Robert D. Bullard's Environmental Justice Theory as the theoretical lens basing on Billy Collins' poem referred to as "Dancing Words". The research endeavors to untangle the complex linkages of poetic modes with these environmental worries, and it will initially discuss how literature can function as an influential tool in regards to articulating environmental mentality. Taking into account Bullard's concept of the Environmental Justice Theory, which is occupied with portraying Hugo vision on how environmental benefits and burdens are distributed unevenly in society among those various groups Collins can definitely be viewed like one cite that involves some socio-environmental implications.

**Keywords:** Eco-criticism, Environmental Justice Theory, Literature and Environment, Billy Collins, Dancing Words, Socio-environmental Implications, Ecological Narratives

### INTRODUCTION

One of the modern literary theories is an eco-criticism, which arose from ecological apprehensions that became significant in the conditions of late 20th century. The book is an analysis of the concept that lies at the heart literature, precisely its relationship with nature. The text discusses how texts takes up positions on ecological issues or how they deal with environmental ethics and its view thinks about human place in the environment. This interdisciplinary methodology integrates research approaches from environmental science and cultural studies in order to analyze how literature responds, questions the understanding of nature, or forms a narrative discourse on nature. Drawing from this definition, eco-criticism takes into account the natural environment and its sustainability in society. It lays emphasis on how literature depends on nature to exist meaningfully; there is a symbiotic connection between them that

cannot be broken easily. This view also recognizes that works of literature are more than just telling but calls for its readers to reflect upon the cultural attitude towards nature. It can be seen that literature becomes a tool for representing the environmental problems that are considered as climate change, biodiversity loss and ecological crisis due to humans' negative impact. On the other hand, in terms of literature and creation of a story setting and source metaphor natural world is used for all that. Robert D. Bullard is credited as the "father of environmental justice," and has been instrumental in launching the Environmental Justice Movement in the late twentieth century. His Environmental Justice Theory is about the uneven distribution of costs for environmental hazards and benefits, emphasizing how social, economic and racial inequalities overlap with issues around the environment. Bullard's framework deals with just and inclusive provision as

well as preservation of environmental resources, combined with inclusivity in making decisions. Considering the environmental ethics theory Despite the fact that many of texts have been analyzed and critiqued across various themes, none holds more recognition in this analysis than Robert D. Bullard's Environmental Justice Theory since it furnishes a lens through which to scrutinize social-environmentalism elements upon literary works. When this theory is used in poetry, it helps the readers to find layers of meaning regarding environmental injustices, inequalities and how humanity relates within nature.

The poetry of Billy Collins is often characterized by its simplicity and accessibility, as well as the themes it deals with mainly connected to ordinary situations. Collins is renowned for his wit, observational skills and deep discernment; he summons readers to see the special among the everyday. One of his poems that stands out for this reflects style and makes it a standout element in his work is the 'Dancing Words' poem as its simplicity coupled with multiple meaning alluded therein goes beyond recognition.

After analyzing 'Dancing Words' through the eco-critical perspective, we do not only get a more profound comprehension of Billy Collins' poetry. This shines light on the environmental aspects that form a part of his lines thus enhancing understanding as to how language, human and natural world did serve in this specific poem's intricate waltz.

### Scope and Limitations of Research

#### Scope

This paper delves deep into the eco-critical dimensions of Billy Collins' Poetry; to take an intimate look at his work *Dancing Words* and make a profound analysis as regards some of the ecological narratives that are inherent in it. Further, the research adopts Robert D. Bullard's Environmental Justice Theory in particular as a theoretical lens on which to base its findings; it adds one more element to a developing body of literature surrounding these three interrelated ideas-environmental justice and literary studies. What is more, this research intends to add on the current knowledge by providing new findings

on critical eco-analysis of poetry and reiterating once again the power of literature in reflecting and analyzing environmental issues.

#### LIMITATIONS

The study is limited to the interpretation of one poem, 'Dancing Words' by Billy Collins. However, this might make the findings less generalizable to other literary works while contributing a detailed analysis. Eco-criticism is very subjective. The results of this study could be driven solely by how the researcher sees and comments on the poem; hence, it is impossible or improper to indicate all possible points of view. Moreover, this study primarily places emphasis only on the literary elements of 'Dancing Words' and may not fully delve into wider socio-political or historical settings that would theoretically have a bearing on how environmental justice themes are read. Finally, this research only uses Robert D. Bullard's Environmental Justice Theory, leaving out other theoretical frameworks that could offer different views of the ecological narrations in the poem.

Having admitted these boundaries and contexts, this research paper endeavored to deliver a constrained yet discerning inquiry into Dancing Words by employing an environmental justice perspective in the ecological narratives.

#### Significance of Research

This research paper provides a critical investigation of 'Dancing Words' in the frame environmental justice in order to contribute to an ongoing debate and development process within eco-criticism as novel trend. It adds to the conversation among scholars, investigating possible use of poetry for addressing ecological stories. Furthermore, the research points to the strength of literature and, in particular poetry as a means of encouraging an environmental consciousness. Through the analysis of ecological themes in "Dancing Words," this research emphasizes how literature has a unique capacity to stimulate reflection and discussion regarding urgent environmental concerns. Moreover, the paper connects the world of literature and environmental justice using Robert D. Bullard's Theory of Environmental Justice Applications This shows how analyses of literary works through a

justice view can help gain more comprehensive insights into the issue of environment. Lastly, by taking a close look at the eco-critical elements of one single poem, this paper is setting up future research journeys. It promotes further dialogue for scholars to undertake similar analyses in different works of literature, poets or genres thereby developing a holistic outlook that incorporates all the issues at play between literature and environmental justice. In other words, this research paper is a valuable addition to literary studies along with environmental discourse and education aimed at raising the reader's awareness of how literature relates to environmental justice as well on how art can be used for more social ideas.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In what ways, the presence of ecological narratives in Billy Collins' poem 'Dancing Words', and the use of various literary devices to provide environmental themes within this text?

How can Robert D. Bullard's Environmental Justice Theory be applied in conducting 'Dancing Words' analysis, and how does the poem explore environmental justice issues from both a distributive and procedural perspectives?

What are the implications of drawing an eco-critical analysis from "Dancing Words" – held to be one poem form among many different categories; as far as literature and environmental awareness or concerns may lie, what weight does poetry wield in terms at least of its capacity to touch on discussions about issues around environment justice and equity?

### OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH

To study Billy Collins' poem 'Dancing Words' from the perspective of eco-critique and to look at key literary devices, structures or elements in order to show how they build ecological narratives within a given text.

In 'Dancing words' and need to systematically apply Robert D. Bullard's Environmental Justice Theory from the poem itself, dissect its context unraveling elements in content that are connection with environmental justice themes justified by a principal focus on distributive and procedural forms as outlined clearly of this form of theory

extenuations provided for concerted power intentions relations about comprehensive societal issues such as equity, abnegation integrity.

In order to properly evaluate the wider significance of this eco-critical analysis, it will be appropriate for someone to consider a discussion that points in what way literary art, i.e. poetry helps spreading public awareness about environment-related problems even further; thus – adding on authenticity and relevance ascribed by Jindal's analyzed case-study. Moreover, the researcher will assess – to what extent can purpose of using 'Dancing Words' be useful for discussing about environmental justice and equity within larger picture or how far Literature links with relevant real life problems.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Eco-criticism is defined primarily conceptually as an assessment and interpretation of literature with a more active engagement on evaluating how such texts reflected ecological concerns. According to Buell (2001), eco-criticism is an important method of understanding the ecological aspects in literary works. This is better in scope beyond the confines of old literary analysis helping us to go deeper into understanding human relationship with nature. Eco-poetry and the manner in which poets address issues to do with environment lend themselves almost naturally to a type of literary criticism called eco-criticism because they provide an interesting way of looking at ecological concerns.

According to Glotfelty and Fromm (1996), nature poetry should be considered from an eco-critical point of view, paying attention to the role in shaping environmental consciousness played by poets as well as the input made by them into environmental activism. The value of poems is enhanced using eco-critical analysis because it reveals the ecological consciousness embedded in such verses (Bate, 2000). Moreover, the study of eco-criticism allows for investigating human experience in its connections to or implications on nature. As Abrams (2012) argues, many a time poets use nature as a metaphor to present larger truths and challenge societal norms. By revealing these considerations and their potential consequences, this point of view provides readers with an opportunity to reconsider

their own relations between people and nature hence promoting the rising ecological consciousness in society.

Eco-critical analysis of poetry frequently unveils the subtle stories intertwining human experience and nature. Reputed poets such as Mary Oliver in her anthology *American Primitive* (1983), for example, delve with fine intricacy on the linked concepts of life and nature. When analyzed from an ecological critical lens, Oliver's lines reveal a fine equilibrium between the human and non-human factors thus fuelling awareness about environmental issues (Bryson 2010). Furthermore, ecopoetry has emerged as a prominent notion within eco-criticism that focuses upon the poetic articulation of ecological concerns. This is quite evident in some of the modern poets such as Wendell Berry whose works implore readers to think about what people are doing to effectively ruin the magnificent surroundings that nature has gifted them (Slovic, 2019). The eco-critical interpretation of these poems, however, illuminates the sense of urgency associated with environmental stewardship and how man's choices have an immense effect on nature. Billy Collins is a famous poet who writes meaningful and understandable poems. His collection of poems *Dancing Words* is a demonstration of his prowess in threading out words to find emotions and observation. In "*Dancing Words*," Collins uses informal conversation and humorous metaphors to encourage the readers to relate his verses in a playful manner. The anthology raises the issues of love, transitory moments in life, and beauty seen in mundane events. The rhyme scheme and Collins' language are both playful, but they carry a poignancy that makes his poems delightful for readers to go through (Smith 2017). For instance, one notorious poem from the association "Introduction to Poetry" instructs readers on how to view poetry with curiosity and move along dancing rather than. This reflective passage shows Collins' enduring faith in the transformative capabilities of language and his claim to be able to draw delight from rendering lines more interactive or imaginative.

One of the scholars who have developed Environmental Justice Theory to a significant level is Robert D. Bullard, an outstanding contributor to environmental justice. In his work, he examines how

people express their concern for the world's problems from a social equity perspective and further emphasizes that few phenomena can be compared to environmental hazards that affect disadvantaged communities more (Bullard & Smith, 1990).

Bullard's foundational book, *Dumping in Dixie: Back in 1990*, Paul Mohai did a distinguishing work known as *Regional Concerns: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality*; this he characterized as the introduction of the foundation for environmental justice theories by looking at how underprivileged communities make up an unusually heavy burden of pollution. This ground-breaking work subverts conventional environmental rhetoric and endorses all-inclusive policies regarding the environment (Bullard, 1990). The model of Environmental Justice Framework by Bullard states that environmental decisions must be fair and inclusive in nature. His contributions in theory have had a significant influence on environmental activism and policy initiatives, thus molding more equal approaches towards finding solutions to environmental threats (Schlosberg, 2007).

## METHODOLOGY

The present paper relies qualitative means to carry out a full-scale analysis of the poem *Dancing Words*, thus identifying and explicating eco-centric constituent parts within this literary composition. The paper uses Robert D. Bullard's Environmental Justice Theory as a conceptual platform to discuss the socio-environmental aspects that are woven into the poetic narrative.

## Discussion and Analysis

### Equitable Access to Nature

As we get further into the poem, Collins begins to include images of "*a sun standing on a hillock / of its own rays*," for example, that make us wonder whether or not there is some underlying truths to inaccessibility when it comes these natural joys. While these landscapes might create a sense of awe with their vivid depiction, are some communities or certain groups deprived of having such breathtaking scenes in reality? This is where the Environmental Justice Theory comes in with an argument that it requires us to take into consideration the imbalanced distribution of environmental

benefits and burdens within Last Child in The Woods; therefore, we have no other option but questioning whether or not Allen has subtly indicated these inequalities.

Consider, for example the passage of a “*thick forest*” in which “*the trees are lumberjacks / cutting themselves down.*” The bringing together of nature and human activity here raises thoughts on exploitation as well as environmental destruction. Secondly, does the poem note incidence of environmental injustices brought about by deforestation, given that those affected more are communities, which use forest for their survival? Through analyzing these nuances, we can understand whether the poem corresponds to environmental justice principles of acknowledging and taking actions related to such disparities.

### Environmental Injustice Awareness

Moreover, further into the poem Collins brings in a dynamic deviation of attention with lines like “*The words are also dancing. / they are refusing to be nailed down, / pulling away from the letters/ and captions*” (25-28) in what way does a shift lead us explore how we now notice injustice towards nature as well? Does it illuminate that in terms of the more profound effect on low-income and marginalized communities; by environmental issues also stress Julius’s concerns for equal treatment to all. What if the dancing words represent opposition and firmness against language limitation, just as people dwelling in margins tries to fight for their rights instead of environmental oppression? However, if the poem incorporates an industrial backdrop with these moving words then it would possibly imply a message concerning disparate weight of disease on different populations where some individuals suffer most from pollution and degradation. Additionally, when the poem contains elements of environmental activism or protest, it fits within the concept that environmental justice is not limited to accepting injustices but also participating in reforming them. This is necessary since the analysis here should serve as a tool that helps to reveal how “Dancing Words” moves through the open territory of eco-consciousness and environmental justice.

### Power Dynamics in Environmental Decision-Making

The issue of power in environmental decision-making can be drawn from the poem by highlighting parts that subtly look into imbalances. Is this poem in accordance with Bullard’s call for including the marginalized voices when formulating environmental policies and practices?

For some situations, if Collins depicts a peaceful river in the midst of an active city, does the poem support saying that there may be environmental injustices as far industrial pollution is concerned and how this affects its inhabitants near it especially those living on outlying areas due to designated zones. By looking at the power dynamics embedded in such situations, we can determine whether the poem supports a more inclusive and fairer form of environmental decision-making.

Through intertwining these aspects in the analysis, we could come up with interior and relational components of “*Dancing Words*” that contribute to its discussion of environmental justice. Indeed, the poem’s articulate investigation of nature, speech and social determinants makes readers to reflect on intricate problems concerning environment as well as connections between environmental issues and those related to justice.

### Connection between Language and Environment

In the poem “*Dancing Words*”, we can see direct parallels between language and environment; in this context, it is a poetry that forms a veritable tapestry of allusion interweaving meanings for human communication and understanding. How does the poem associate language with environment, and does it present a notion that effective communication is important in resolving environmental justice issues? The words dancing about, “*They refused to be nailed down*” and pulling away from the letters and captions could perhaps express defiance towards limiting expressions or fixed narratives. This could be understood as a plea for a debate on environmental issues to change its characteristics and become more dynamic, all-inclusive. As the words refuse to be confined, so may the poem call for liberation from conventional, exclusive stories about environment. Analyzing the dynamics

between language and environmental justice, we can locate certain moments when the poem suggests that diversity of voices and visions is a necessity in good communication. This could be illustrated using the nature of the characters in a particular poem discussing issues concerning the environment; if these have wide, varied backgrounds, this could suggest that there has been an all-encompassing approach to environmental narrative. Moreover, the poem can also be perceived as evidence that together language can employ a tool of environmental activism. On the one hand, moving words are portrayed as agents of revolution against traditions and stories that we no longer wish to follow, More helpful yet is the idea that it seems as though language may just be a potent enough force able to address environmental injustices This supports Bullard's claim that communication and dialogue are part of the realization of environmental justice. Introducing these contexts to the analysis also facilitates a greater comprehension of how "*Dancing Words*" walks this intricate line between language and environment, taking us closer towards environmental justice in what kind of communication.

### CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the situation in which those above manifestations are observed from Robert D. Bullard's Environmental Justice Theory is a poetic context because poetry acts as an art by magnifying humanity circumstances such as issues surrounding our environment (almost any poem that poet writes can be based on nature easily for when you read about Tennyson stream of Crystal Maiden in Idylls ,for instance, and Looking at "Dancing Words" in a different angle, it represents feeling that may be seen by these discoveries as qualities not given to human beings naturally hence their role in social order concerning decisions about environment; each other or information-addressing weather such as when naming climate. On the basis of which, but not color, this kind of picture may be done, a perfect picture of a document colorizing on line example is Pro Moray. Carla Wise, in her article "Dancing Words," says, "Like where environmental justice is acting instead of pigment." (Madden 8), and for that matter, how people think now about how language takes action

too upon nature rather than human society. Therefore, this analysis presents the prism through which we can observe how artfully thoughts develop in "Dancing Words" and understand what great impact they create with regard to starting up discussions intended for issues like environmental justice or inclusiveness as well as the need for joint actions directed at solving current problems. In addition, one of the studies that has been carried out under an eco-critical approach in a theory called environmental justice and also limited within the perspective of sense for narrative correlates towards dancing words with ecological understanding from an overarching dialectic where literature, ecology, and social justice interplay and continue to enforce each other through their complex relationship with the poet acting as catalyst penned down by Billy Collins titled 'Dancing Words' In the eco-criticism beyond its relevance in the explanatory work on the manufacturing elements allied to the environment, a prompt examination is required of how one can negotiate meaning and de-construct ecological narratives woven into Collin's poems. I believe that synthesis involving both eco-critical as well as environmental justice theory is helpful. This will surely help one comprehend fully what language, nature balance, and society's disquiet were all about. This essay, as we wander through the melange of complicated problems our present-age days have for us, pleads for literature in a sense and to readers more particularly, to be also "responsive or responsible" within it did offer up-interverted such ability-power-Usage-had—fervent, budding, brilliant promise—about reader-conscious awareness that can creatively inspire human beings to imagine. Therefore, Collins art of language and imagery is a microcosm within the larger world we daily battle with in our environmental concerns on this globe. From an eco-critical perspective, one of the ways readers can begin to see what James' literature feminizes is by considering it a mirror that shows how beliefs look from without. This analysis further involves the incorporation of the environmental justice theory in developing a more profound understanding about sociopolitical implications contained within ecological discourse. The intersections of environmental degradation and social inequality are acutely spelled out in the lines of 'Dancing Words', hence put an

emphasis on necessity to unite treating both ecological and justice issues. This research argues that the fostering of environmental justice depends not only on all players to commit themselves to sustainable practices but also in acknowledging there are multiple ways through which communities can be affected disproportionately by depletion in ecology. In the larger sense, when we think about generalizations to be made from this study, it is quite clear that including eco-critical analyses inside environmental justice frameworks provides a more than adequate lens through which literature may play its part in adding another dimension within the discussion of our planet's future. This connection between literary inquiry and environmental sustainability supports the assertion that literature is not a distant artistic endeavor but an active mechanism through which concerted efforts can be motivated, thus popularizing environmentally friendly atmosphere. In short, this study supports for an increased fusion of eco-critical viewpoints and theories on environmental justice in literary wishes. In such a way, it is possible to develop the more comprehensive grasp of the complex ties between people, literature and nature. 'Dancing Words' performs its functions as a poetic work of art and an intriguing case study. It encourages us to reconsider our place in being the sentinels responsible for Earth while fostering another level of dedication to establishing sustainable goals alongside virtually equal live side by side with nature's formations.

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