

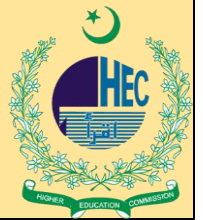

ADVANCE SOCIAL SCIENCE ARCHIVE JOURNAL

 Available Online: <https://assajournal.com>

Vol. 5 No. 02 Apr-Jun 2026. Page#.38-49

 Print ISSN: [3006-2497](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19557820) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19557820)

Platform & Workflow by: Open Journal Systems

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19557820>

Green Consumerism and Contemporary Fiction: An Eco-Marxist Study
Rakia Imtiaz

Ph.D. Scholar, Department of English Language and Literature, The University of Faisalabad.

2021-phd-el-019@tuf.edu.pk
Prof. Dr. Nailah Riaz

Department of English Language and Literature, The University of Faisalabad.

nailah.riaz@tuf.edu.pk
Abstract

*This article interrogates the complex portrayal of green consumerism within contemporary fiction through the theoretical lens of Eco-Marxism. It argues that while literature often reflects the growing societal push towards environmentally conscious purchasing, it simultaneously subjects this phenomenon to a rigorous critique, exposing its limitations and contradictions within the overarching structure of capitalism. By analyzing a selection of key contemporary novels, including Richard Powers's *The Overstory*, Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife*, Abbi Waxman's *The Garden of Small Beginnings*, and Christy Lefteri's *The Beekeeper of Aleppo*, this research demonstrates how narrative fiction serves as a vital medium for Eco-Marxist thought. These works not only depict the commodification of nature and the ensuing ecological crises but also problematize the notion that individual consumer choice can suffice in addressing systemic failures. The findings suggest that contemporary eco-fiction functions as a powerful pedagogical tool, challenging the ideologies of green capitalism and advocating for a fundamental, systemic transformation towards ecological socialism as the only viable path to genuine sustainability.*

Keywords: Eco-Marxism, Green Consumerism, Contemporary Fiction, Ecocriticism, Capitalism, Sustainability, Commodification of Nature

1. Introduction

Green consumerism refers to the conscious effort by consumers to purchase products and services that minimize harm to the environment. This movement, rooted in environmental awareness and sustainability, promotes ethical consumption practices that reduce ecological footprints. Eco-Marxism, on the other hand, is a theoretical approach that reviews capitalism's role in environmental degradation, viewing ecological crises as an inherent outcome of capitalist production systems. This perspective emphasizes the need for systemic change rather than individual consumer behavior to achieve environmental sustainability. This study highlights how green consumerism often becomes co-opted by capitalist markets, reducing it to a form of greenwashing where environmental concerns are superficially addressed to drive consumer sales. Critics argue that green consumerism fails to challenge the underlying structures of capitalist production that lead to environmental destruction, instead placing the burden of responsibility on individual consumers.

The research shows that while green consumerism raises awareness about environmental issues, it can also perpetuate the idea that consumer choices alone can solve environmental problems, thus diverting attention from the need for broader systemic change. Studies indicate that the rise of eco-friendly products is often driven more by market demand than by genuine environmental concern. The commodification of sustainability within capitalist markets can

dilute the radical potential of green consumerism. Contemporary fiction has increasingly incorporated themes of environmentalism, sustainability, and green consumerism.

This genre, often referred to as eco-fiction, serves as a platform for exploring the human-nature relationship and critiquing unsustainable practices. Authors use speculative fiction, dystopian settings, and character-driven narratives to highlight the consequences of environmental degradation and the potential for sustainable futures. Eco-fiction often functions as a form of environmental advocacy, raising awareness about ecological issues and encouraging readers to reflect on their own consumption practices. This genre provides a narrative space where the complexities of environmentalism, including the contradictions within green consumerism, can be explored. Recent works of eco-fiction have begun to incorporate critical perspectives on green consumerism, questioning its efficacy and exposing its limitations within the context of capitalist economies.

These narratives often align with Eco-Marxist critiques by highlighting how consumerism, even when green, fails to address the root causes of ecological crises. Eco-Marxism provides a framework for understanding the limitations of green consumerism as depicted in contemporary fiction. It critiques the capitalist structures that underpin consumerism, arguing that true environmental sustainability requires a fundamental shift away from profit-driven production towards a more equitable and ecologically sound system. Eco-Marxist scholars argue that capitalism's inherent need for growth and profit leads to the exploitation of natural resources, resulting in environmental degradation. Green consumerism, while seemingly a step in the right direction, is seen as insufficient to counteract these systemic issues. Contemporary fiction often reflects these Eco-Marxist critiques, portraying green consumerism as a superficial solution that fails to challenge the capitalist system. Through dystopian futures and speculative narratives, these works illustrate the potential consequences of relying solely on consumer choices to address environmental problems.

1.1. Research Questions

- 1) How can literature be used to promote environmental awareness and sustainability in the context of ecological Marxism and green consumerism?
- 2) How is ecological awareness represented in contemporary literature, and what are the underlying assumptions and values associated with these representations?

1.2. Significance of the Study

This research study aims to design the concept that green consumerism in contemporary literature is significant for its role in reflecting, critiquing, and shaping societal attitudes towards environmental issues. It provides a lens which explores cultural shifts, values, and the potential impact of literature on fostering environmental awareness and responsible consumer behavior. In conducting the literature review, it's essential to critically evaluate study methodologies, contextual relevance, and implications of findings. Staying updated with recent publications captures the field's dynamic nature, considering government policies, regulations, and incentives promoting green consumerism. The impact of eco-friendly certifications, consumer satisfaction, and post-purchase behavior, including word-of-mouth communication and brand loyalty, are core concerns. This study will employ a mixed-methodology, drawing on a range of literary texts from contemporary genres and cultural contexts. The research will involve a close reading of concerned texts, as well as an analysis of the broader social, political, and environmental contexts in which they were produced.

2. Literature Review

This literature review establishes the scholarly terrain that this study navigates. It synthesizes existing research and critical thought across three interconnected domains: the theoretical

foundations of Eco-Marxism, the literary-critical field of ecocriticism and eco-fiction, and the sociological phenomenon of green consumerism. The structure of this section ensures that the evaluated material is linked to build a coherent foundation, demonstrating how this study distinguishes itself by applying a rigorous Eco-Marxist critique to the portrayal of green consumerism within contemporary narrative fiction. The primary research objective is to examine the interactions between green consumerism and ecology in contemporary literature using an eco-Marxist and eco-fiction lens, thereby exploring how literature reflects, critiques, and potentially shapes societal attitudes towards environmental sustainability.

The review begins by tracing the evolution of ecological consciousness in literature and theory, outlining the rise of ecocriticism and its expansion to include critical frameworks like Eco-Marxism. It then delves into the specific tenets of Eco-Marxism, positioning it as an essential tool for analyzing the structural roots of the ecological crisis. Subsequently, it reviews the concept of green consumerism, highlighting both its promises and the potent critiques levied against it from various scholarly standpoints. Finally, it surveys key primary texts of contemporary eco-fiction, analyzing how they engage with these theoretical and sociological concerns, thereby creating a dynamic dialogue between narrative form and environmental content.

2.1. The Evolution of Ecocriticism and Ecological Consciousness in Literature

The ecological dimension of literature has found sustained and systematic attention only since the late 20th century with the rise of ecocriticism. Initially emerging from a revalorization of nature writing in the United States, ecocriticism positioned itself as a countermovement to the text-centric approaches of the linguistic turn in literary studies (Buell, 1995; Glotfelty, 1996). Pioneers like Lawrence Buell and Cheryll Glotfelty were instrumental in framing ecocriticism as a response to the human-nature divide in literary scholarship, arguing for the importance of the "physical world" in literary analysis.

Since its inception, the scope of ecocritical studies has widened significantly. It now encompasses literary texts and genres across different periods and cultures, moving beyond its initial focus on American nature writing. Against the backdrop of the global environmental crisis, ecocriticism has made a strong case for the contribution of literature and art to the critique of anthropocentric master narratives and to the imaginative exploration of sustainable alternatives to the historically fraught human-nature relationship (Buell, 1995).

Scholars have examined the ecological potential in various periods, from Indigenous storytelling modes and Romantic transcendentalism to modernism, postmodernism, and the explicit responses to the Anthropocene in contemporary writing. The value of literary texts, as argued by ecocritics, lies not just in their thematic engagement with environmental issues but in their distinctive aesthetic features. These include embodied multiperspectivity, empathetic imagination, the reconnection of cultural to natural ecosystems, polysemic openness, and the participatory inclusion of the reader in the transformative experience offered by the texts. This capacity of narrative to foster ecological consciousness is central to the analysis of contemporary eco-fiction.

2.2. Theoretical Foundations: Eco-Marxism as a Critical Framework

Eco-Marxism, often referred to as ecosocialism or green Marxism, is a distinct trend within Western Marxism that emerged in response to the ecological challenges of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. This perspective synthesizes the Marxist analysis of capitalism with ecological concerns, arguing that environmental issues are inherently linked to the dynamics of the capitalist mode of production (Foster, 2000).

The core of the Eco-Marxist critique rests on several key propositions:

2.2.1. Critique of Capitalist Growth and Metabolic Rift

Eco-Marxists argue that capitalism, with its emphasis on constant economic growth, profit maximization, and exploitation of natural resources, is inherently unsustainable. The system prioritizes short-term gains over long-term environmental sustainability, treating nature as a "free gift" to be plundered. A central concept in Eco-Marxism, introduced by Marx himself and elaborated by John Bellamy Foster (2000), is the "metabolic rift." This refers to the disruptive separation and dislocation of the natural metabolic processes between human society and the environment under capitalism. The system creates a rift by depleting resources in one location and depositing waste in another, breaking the cyclical processes of nature.

2.2.2. Commodification of Nature and Environmental Justice

Eco-Marxism highlights how capitalism reduces all elements of nature to commodities, to be bought, sold, and exploited for profit. This commodification ignores the intrinsic value of ecosystems and their non-utilitarian functions, leading directly to over-exploitation and degradation. Expanding traditional Marxist focus, Eco-Marxism emphasizes how ecological degradation disproportionately affects marginalized communities. It considers how environmental problems are intertwined with social inequalities, making the fight for ecological health a fundamental part of the class struggle.

2.2.3. Critique of Green Capitalism and Consumerism

Eco-Marxism is deeply skeptical of market-based solutions to the ecological crisis, such as green consumerism or carbon trading. Scholars like Connolly and Prothero (2008) argue that these approaches often reinforce neoliberal ideologies by shifting responsibility from corporations and states onto individual consumers, a process that can lead to greenwashing and fails to address the root causes of the problem. Eco-Marxism, therefore, provides a robust framework for analyzing the systemic forces driving environmental destruction. It advocates for a shift away from the productivist and growth-oriented economic model towards alternative systems that prioritize sustainability, local autonomy, and a harmonious relationship with nature, ultimately envisioning a transition to a form of ecological socialism.

2.2.4. Green Consumerism: Promises and Critiques

Green consumerism, also known as eco-conscious or sustainable consumerism, refers to the practice of making purchasing decisions based on environmental considerations. It involves buying products and supporting businesses that prioritize sustainability, ethical production, and reduced environmental impact. As a field of study, it encompasses research on consumers' attitudes, behaviors, and motivations towards environmentally friendly products. The literature on green consumerism identifies several influencing factors, including demographic variables (age, gender, education), personal values, environmental knowledge, social norms, and the role of marketing, eco-labeling, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. Cross-cultural studies assess how green consumerism varies across different regions and investigate the credibility of green marketing claims. Research highlights obstacles such as the higher prices of eco-friendly products, lack of awareness, skepticism about environmental claims, and cultural or societal factors that hinder green behaviors.

A primary critique, aligned with Eco-Marxist thought, is that green consumerism individualizes and moralizes responsibility for systemic problems. It perpetuates the idea that consumer choices alone can solve environmental issues, thereby diverting attention and political pressure from the need for broader, structural change (Connolly & Prothero, 2008). Critics argue that green consumerism is often co-opted by capitalist markets. Sustainability becomes a new market niche, reducing environmentalism to a form of branding that drives sales without challenging the underlying logic of endless accumulation and consumption. The commodification of sustainability within capitalist markets can dilute its radical potential. Even if widely adopted,

green consumerism is seen by many scholars as insufficient to counteract the scale of the ecological crisis. It does not fundamentally challenge the growth paradigm or the power structures of global capitalism, which are identified as the root causes of environmental degradation.

2.3. The Rise of Eco-Fiction and Its Critical Engagements

Eco-fiction, also known as ecological or environmental fiction, is a literary genre that addresses environmental issues and the human-nature relationship through fictional narratives. Central themes include climate change, deforestation, pollution, biodiversity loss, and unsustainable resource use. The genre often features the natural environment as a dynamic character and explores the consequences of environmental degradation and the potential for positive change through sustainable practices. Prominent examples of eco-fiction, as identified in the primary research, include Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife* (2015), Richard Powers's *The Overstory* (2018), Abbi Waxman's *The Garden of Small Beginnings* (2017), and Christy Lefteri's *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* (2019). These texts, among others, serve as a platform for exploring the complexities of environmentalism, including the contradictions within green consumerism.

2.4. Environmental Advocacy and Unsustainable Systems

Eco-fiction often functions as a form of advocacy, raising awareness about ecological issues and encouraging readers to reflect on their own consumption practices and relationship with nature. Many works of eco-fiction offer implicit or explicit critiques of the capitalist and industrial systems that lead to environmental destruction. They explore themes of corporate greed, commodification of nature, and the devastating consequences of ecological neglect, often through dystopian or speculative scenarios.

2.5. Exploration of Interconnectedness and Resistance

A common theme in eco-fiction is the interconnectedness of all life. Narratives like *The Overstory* powerfully illustrate the complex, symbiotic relationships within ecosystems, challenging the anthropocentric and utilitarian worldview that enables exploitation. Eco-fiction frequently portrays characters and communities that embrace sustainable practices, from permaculture and off-grid living to environmental activism. These representations can provide models for sustainable living and explore the challenges and sacrifices involved. They also often depict forms of resistance against exploitative systems, aligning with Eco-Marxist calls for collective action.

2.6. Educational Potential

The genre has significant educational potential, fostering environmental literacy by engaging readers emotionally and intellectually with complex issues. It can stimulate discussions on sustainability, policy, and ethics. This study builds upon this existing scholarship by systematically analyzing how these functions and themes in contemporary eco-fiction are specifically inflected through an Eco-Marxist critique of green consumerism.

3. Analysis of Key Primary Texts within the Critical Landscape

This section situates the primary texts of this study within the reviewed literary and theoretical contexts.

3.1. *The Water Knife* by Paolo Bacigalupi

This novel is frequently analyzed as a stark dystopian critique that resonates with Eco-Marxist principles. The literature identifies its central theme as the commodification of water, a fundamental life resource, under a brutal capitalist logic. The narrative vividly illustrates the metabolic rift in a context of extreme scarcity, leading to "environmental injustice" where the poor suffer while the wealthy insulate themselves. The novel serves as a cautionary tale about the consequences of allowing market forces to dictate the distribution of essential resources,

effectively critiquing the very foundation upon which green consumerism rests by presenting a future where it is rendered irrelevant by systemic collapse.

3.2. *The Overstory* by Richard Powers

Critical discussions of this novel focus on its profound exploration of the interconnectedness of life and its powerful portrayal of environmental activism as resistance. The novel is recognized for its critique of the capitalist mindset that views forests as mere timber. Through its character-driven narratives, it champions the intrinsic value of nature, a concept that stands in direct opposition to its commodification. The novel's emphasis on the power of stories to challenge dominant ideologies aligns with the goal of using literature to foster a new ecological consciousness, one that transcends consumerist solutions and advocates for systemic change.

3.3. *The Garden of Small Beginnings* by Abbi Waxman

While less explicitly political than dystopian fiction, these novels contribute to the discourse by modeling alternative, community-oriented relationships with nature. Scholarship on such texts often highlights how they focus on small-scale, sustainable practices (gardening, beekeeping) that exist outside the mainstream consumer economy. They emphasize healing, community, and stewardship, offering visions of sustainability that are based on care and connection rather than purchase and consumption. In doing so, they provide a quiet but potent critique of the alienation and materialism of consumer culture and prefigure the kinds of communal values essential for an eco-socialist future.

3.4. *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* by Christy Lefteri

The Beekeeper of Aleppo by Christy Lefteri tells the story of a Syrian refugee couple who find solace in beekeeping. The novel highlights the intersections of environmental and social justice, portraying the protagonists' relationship with bees as a symbol of resilience and hope. Lefteri's narrative underscores the importance of ecological and humanitarian solidarity, particularly in times of crisis. The author connects the plight of Syrian refugees with the broader themes of environmental and social justice. The novel critiques the capitalist systems that profit from war and displacement, highlighting the interconnections between human suffering and environmental degradation. Through the protagonists' beekeeping practices, Lefteri underscores the importance of sustainable living and ecological harmony as means of resilience and healing in the face of systemic exploitation and conflict.

3.5. *Identifying the Research Gap*

The existing literature provides a robust foundation in ecocriticism, Eco-Marxist theory, the sociology of green consumerism, and the analysis of eco-fiction as a genre. However, a discernible gap exists in the sustained and systematic application of a specifically Eco-Marxist critical framework to analyze the portrayal of green consumerism within a curated selection of contemporary fictional narratives. Many studies address eco-fiction's environmental themes, and others critique green consumerism from sociological or economic perspectives. This thesis aims to bridge these discourses. It will demonstrate how contemporary novels do not merely reflect green consumerism but actively dissect it, exposing its limitations and contradictions through narrative form and content. By reading texts like *The Water Knife*, *The Overstory*, *The Garden of Small Beginnings*, and *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* through the lens of Eco-Marxism, this research will illuminate the critical role of literature in challenging the ideologies of green capitalism and in fostering the systemic consciousness necessary for a genuinely sustainable future.

4. Theoretical Framework: Eco-Marxism and Green Consumerism

Eco-Marxism is an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that synthesizes the ecological concerns of environmentalism with the critical analysis of capitalism inherent in Marxist thought.

It seeks to explain how the capitalist system, driven by the imperatives of profit and endless accumulation, is fundamentally responsible for environmental degradation and the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources (Foster, 2000). This framework not only critiques capitalism's role in the ecological crisis but also envisions alternative, sustainable ways of organizing society that prioritize ecological balance and social justice. A cornerstone of Eco-Marxist analysis is the concept of the metabolic rift, a term introduced by Karl Marx and elaborated by contemporary scholars like John Bellamy Foster. The metabolic rift describes the disruptive separation between human societies and the natural world caused by capitalist production. This rift occurs because capitalism severs the processes of consumption and production from their ecological context, leading to the degradation of ecosystems and the depletion of natural resources (Foster, 2000).

The system treats nature as an external, limitless repository of resources and a sink for waste, creating an irreparable tear in the relationship between human society and the natural environment upon which it depends. From this perspective, green consumerism appears not as a solution, but as a contradictory phenomenon within capitalism. Eco-Marxism critiques the very notion of "green capitalism" or "sustainable capitalism," arguing that it is an oxymoron. The drive to commodify nature to put a price on clean air, water, and sustainable products does not challenge the underlying logic of accumulation; it merely expands its domain. As Connolly and Prothero (2008) argue, green consumerism often reinforces neoliberal ideologies by shifting the burden of responsibility for environmental change from corporations and states onto individual consumers. This process can lead to "greenwashing," where corporations adopt environmentally friendly marketing strategies without implementing genuine, systemic changes to their production processes, thereby perpetuating the cycle of exploitation under a veneer of sustainability.

Furthermore, Eco-Marxism highlights the deep alienation from nature fostered by capitalist consumer society. In a system where nature is primarily valued for its economic utility, individuals become disconnected from the ecological systems that sustain life. This alienation is both a cause and a consequence of environmental degradation, as a disconnection from nature diminishes the sense of urgency and responsibility required for its preservation. Consumer culture, with its emphasis on materialism and the constant pursuit of new commodities, exacerbates this disconnection, prioritizing the symbolic value of goods over the intrinsic value of the natural world.

Finally, Eco-Marxism insists on the inextricable link between ecological degradation and social inequality. The negative consequences of environmental crises such as pollution, resource scarcity, climate disasters are disproportionately borne by marginalized and working-class communities, both within nations and globally between the Global North and South.

This dynamic reflects what Rob Nixon (2011) terms slow violence, a form of violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, dispersed across time and space, with its casualties often being the poor and disenfranchised. An Eco-Marxist approach, therefore, demands a convergence of environmental and social justice movements, advocating for a systemic transformation that addresses both economic exploitation and ecological destruction. In summary, the Eco-Marxist framework provides a powerful set of tools for deconstructing the narratives of green consumerism. It reveals the limitations of market-based solutions, critiques the alienation inherent in consumer culture, and underscores the need for a collective, revolutionary shift towards an eco-socialist society. This theoretical lens is essential for understanding the critical depth with which contemporary fiction engages with environmental themes.

4.1. *The Limits of Green Consumption in a Dystopian Marketplace*

Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife* presents a harrowing vision of a near-future American Southwest ravaged by extreme water scarcity. The novel serves as a potent case study for an Eco-Marxist critique, as it vividly dramatizes the ultimate consequence of the commodification of nature: a world where life itself in the form of water is a fiercely contested commodity controlled by capitalist elites. In this dystopia, green consumerism, in any meaningful sense, is an unaffordable luxury; the narrative exposes a raw struggle for survival in a system where resource control equates to absolute power. The central theme of the novel is the commodification of a fundamental natural resource. Water is no longer a public good or a human right but a privatized asset, traded, hoarded, and weaponized by powerful corporations and states. This mirrors the Eco-Marxist critique of capitalism's tendency to enclose and commodify all aspects of nature. As the thesis notes, In *The Water Knife*, the commodification of water not only highlights the exploitation of natural resources but also serves as a critique of capitalist structures that prioritize short-term gains over long-term ecological health. Characters like Angel Velasquez, the water knife of the title, are agents of this system, tasked with securing water rights through any means necessary, illustrating how capitalist logic leads directly to violence and social breakdown.

Bacigalupi meticulously explores the theme of environmental injustice. The devastating effects of water scarcity are not felt equally. The wealthy live in sealed, climate-controlled arcologies with abundant water, while the poor, like the novel's protagonist Maria Villarosa, struggle to survive in desiccated, lawless zones. This stark division reflects the Eco-Marxist argument that capitalism exacerbates social inequality, as those without economic power are left to suffer the consequences of ecological collapse. The novel thus functions as a powerful illustration of Nixon's "slow violence," where the gradual crisis of drought culminates in a visible, brutal struggle that disproportionately impacts the most vulnerable.

Within this context, the novel offers a searing critique of capitalist ideology, particularly the concept of scarcity economics. The scarcity in *The Water Knife* is not merely a natural phenomenon; it is manufactured and manipulated by those in power to maintain control. The market, far from providing an efficient solution, becomes a mechanism for reinforcing social hierarchies and enabling the ruthless exploitation of both people and the planet. The thesis observes that Bacigalupi suggests that capitalism, far from providing solutions to resource scarcity, actively perpetuates and exacerbates it through its emphasis on profit and control. This resonates with the Eco-Marxist critique of neoliberal environmental policies, which often rely on market-based mechanisms that ultimately serve the interests of the wealthy.

While *The Water Knife* is a bleak narrative, it also subtly explores themes of resistance and collective action. Characters like Maria and Angel, though initially complicit in or victimized by the system, eventually navigate paths of rebellion and survival. Their actions, however fraught and limited, hint at the potential for resistance against the forces of ecological exploitation. This aligns with the Eco-Marxist emphasis on the necessity of collective struggle to challenge entrenched power structures. The novel suggests that in the face of systemic collapse, individual consumer choices are meaningless; what is required is organized resistance and a fundamental reimagining of how society manages its most vital resources.

In conclusion, *The Water Knife* functions as a cautionary tale that preemptively critiques the logic of green consumerism by presenting a future where such choices are no longer possible. It demonstrates that when capitalism is allowed to commodify the very elements necessary for life, the result is not sustainability but a dystopian nightmare of extreme inequality and violence.

The novel powerfully affirms the Eco-Marxist tenet that ecological crises are inseparable from the economic systems that produce them.

4.2. Interconnectedness and Resistance

Richard Powers's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Overstory* offers a profound and expansive exploration of human-nature relationships that, while not explicitly Marxist, provides a narrative foundation deeply resonant with Eco-Marxist principles. Through its intricate weaving of multiple character arcs, all connected thematically and narratively to trees, the novel critiques the utilitarian, capitalist worldview that reduces nature to a commodity and champions a philosophy of interconnectedness, intrinsic value, and radical activism.

The novel's most significant contribution to an Eco-Marxist discourse is its relentless emphasis on the interconnectedness of all life. Powers portrays trees not as passive resources but as sentient, communicative beings engaged in complex, symbiotic relationships within vast ecosystems. This perspective directly challenges the capitalist and anthropocentric mindset that views nature as a collection of discrete objects to be exploited. The scientific revelations of characters like Patricia Westerford, who discovers the "wood wide web," serve to illustrate that forests are far more than the sum of their timber value. This ecological vision aligns with the Eco-Marxist critique of the metabolic rift, suggesting that healing the rift requires recognizing and respecting these deep, systemic interconnections.

The novel argues that humanity's fate is inextricably linked to the health of these ecosystems, and their destruction signifies a catastrophic failure of our economic and cultural systems. *The Overstory* is also a powerful narrative of environmental activism as resistance to capitalist exploitation. Characters such as Olivia Vandergriff and Nick Hoel undergo radical transformations, evolving from individuals focused on personal concerns into dedicated activists who risk their lives to protect ancient forests from logging corporations. Their activism is portrayed not merely as conservation but as a direct confrontation with the capitalist forces that treat nature as a disposable resource. The thesis notes that the characters' efforts to protect forests from logging corporations highlight the tension between environmental preservation and economic development, a core issue within Ecological Marxism. This activism, though often ending in tragedy or failure within the novel, is presented as a moral and existential imperative, echoing the Eco-Marxist call for systemic change.

The novel further critiques the power of dominant cultural narratives that sustain capitalist exploitation. Powers suggests that the stories a society tells itself about nature are primarily stories of dominion and utility shape its destructive behaviors. *The Overstory* itself is an attempt to write a counter-narrative, a story that re-enchants the natural world and assigns it intrinsic value independent of human use. This aligns with the Marxist concept of ideology, where dominant narratives serve to maintain the status quo. By offering an alternative story of connection and reverence, the novel performs ideological work, challenging the capitalist narrative and encouraging a shift in consciousness. The novel itself can be seen as a meta-commentary on the power of stories to challenge dominant ideologies, the thesis argues.

The theme of deforestation in the novel is a direct representation of the metabolic rift in action. Powers illustrates how the destruction of ancient forests leads to cascading consequences: loss of biodiversity, contribution to climate change, and profound spiritual and psychological despair for those who recognize the loss. This devastation is portrayed as the inevitable outcome of an economic system that prioritizes short-term profit over long-term ecological health. The novel's depiction of the irreversible damage caused by deforestation serves as a stark Eco-Marxist warning about the unsustainable trajectory of capitalist modernity. In summary, *The Overstory* provides a literary embodiment of key Eco-Marxist concerns. It critiques the commodification of

nature, celebrates resistance against exploitative systems, and advocates for a paradigm shift towards a holistic understanding of humanity's place within the web of life. It suggests that the path to sustainability lies not in green consumer products but in a profound re-evaluation of our relationship with the natural world, one that recognizes the limits of the planet and the intrinsic value of its non-human inhabitants.

4.3. Personal Healing and Communal Alternatives: Intimations of Post-Capitalist Ecology

While dystopian novels like *The Water Knife* offer stark warnings, and epics like *The Overstory* call for large-scale activism, other contemporary fictions explore sustainability and ecological consciousness on a more intimate, personal scale. Novels such as Abbi Waxman's *The Garden of Small Beginnings* and Christy Lefteri's *The Beekeeper of Aleppo*, though different in tone and primary focus, contribute to the Eco-Marxist critique by highlighting alternative models of relating to nature that exist outside or in opposition to capitalist consumerism. They focus on community, healing, and the small-scale, regenerative practices that prefigure an eco-socialist sensibility.

Abbi Waxman's *The Garden of Small Beginnings* uses the simple act of gardening as a metaphor for a more sustainable and connected way of life. The novel follows Lilian Girvan, a young widow, as she navigates grief and renewal through a gardening class. The narrative champions small-scale, sustainable practices like organic gardening, seed saving, and local food production. These practices stand in stark contrast to the large-scale, industrialized agriculture that is a hallmark of capitalist production and a major contributor to ecological degradation. The garden becomes a space where characters reconnect with the rhythms of nature, challenging the alienation prevalent in modern consumer society. This focus on the local and the communal aligns with Eco-Marxist visions that advocate for decentralized, smaller-scale production as a more ecologically sound alternative to monolithic capitalist enterprises.

The novel emphasizes the importance of community and collective effort. The gardening class fosters a supportive network where knowledge, resources, and emotional sustenance are shared. This model of cooperation presents a powerful alternative to the individualism and competition fostered by capitalism. From an Eco-Marxist perspective, such communal initiatives represent the seeds of a new society based on mutual aid rather than profit. They demonstrate that sustainable living is not just an individual choice but a collective endeavor, reinforcing the idea that addressing ecological crises requires rebuilding social bonds and community resilience. Christy Lefteri's *The Beekeeper of Aleppo*, while primarily a novel about the trauma of war and displacement, powerfully weaves ecological themes into its narrative. The protagonist, Nuri, is a beekeeper, and his relationship with the bees serves as a poignant symbol of a harmonious and symbiotic relationship with nature. Beekeeping represents a form of stewardship that works with natural systems rather than dominating them. The destruction of the bees and their hives in war-torn Syria parallels the destruction of human communities, illustrating the interconnectedness of social and ecological well-being a central tenet of Eco-Marxist thought. The novel also delves into themes of displacement and environmental injustice. The ecological crisis faced by Nuri and his wife Afra is not one of consumer choice but of catastrophic political and economic failure. Their journey as refugees highlights how the poorest and most vulnerable populations are disproportionately affected by the confluence of social conflict and environmental collapse. This resonates with the Eco-Marxist focus on the global inequalities perpetuated by capitalism and imperialism. The novel suggests that a truly sustainable world must also be a just one, where the "slow violence" of ecological degradation is recognized as a driver of human suffering.

Both novels, in their own ways, model an ecological consciousness that transcends green consumerism. The solutions they propose are not found in buying different products but in

cultivating different relationships with the land, with our food, and with each other. They shift the focus from the market to the community, from consumption to cultivation, and from individual salvation to collective healing. While they may not present a revolutionary political program, they offer a vision of the cultural and personal transformations that are necessary precursors to systemic change. They illustrate that the values required for an eco-socialist future care, reciprocity, community, and a deep respect for nature can be nurtured in the small beginnings of a garden or a beehive.

5. Results and Conclusion

This analysis of contemporary fiction through an Eco-Marxist lens reveals a consistent and powerful critique of the prevailing narratives around environmentalism and sustainability. The novels examined, *The Water Knife*, *The Overstory*, *The Garden of Small Beginnings*, and *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* collectively demonstrate that green consumerism, while a well-intentioned response to ecological crisis, is an insufficient and often co-opted solution when deployed within a capitalist framework. Literature, in this context, functions as a crucial discursive space where the contradictions of green capitalism are exposed and the necessity of systemic alternatives is imagined.

These literary works perform several critical functions, they dramatize the consequences of commodifying nature, showing how the logic of the market, when applied to essential resources like water or ancient forests, leads to profound injustice, violence, and ecological ruin. Moreover, these literary works critique the alienation of consumer society, contrasting the disconnection and materialism of modern life with models of deep engagement with nature and community, and, they highlight the intersection of ecological and social justice, consistently showing that the burdens of environmental degradation fall most heavily on the marginalized, thereby underscoring the need for a unified struggle. Most importantly, contemporary eco-fiction moves beyond critique to envision alternative modes of being. Whether through the radical activism in *The Overstory*, the communal gardening in *The Garden of Small Beginnings*, or the symbiotic stewardship in *The Beekeeper of Aleppo*, these narratives provide glimpses of what an eco-socialist future might entail. They suggest that sustainability is not a product to be purchased but a practice to be cultivated—a practice rooted in interconnectedness, cooperation, and a fundamental reevaluation of the non-human world.

In conclusion, contemporary fiction serves as a vital pedagogical and imaginative tool in the age of ecological crisis. By subjecting green consumerism to an Eco-Marxist critique, these novels challenge readers to look beyond market-based solutions and individualistic responses. They foster the ecological consciousness necessary to recognize that the climate crisis is, at its core, a crisis of our economic system. Ultimately, they inspire the conviction that a sustainable future requires not just changing what we buy, but fundamentally transforming how we produce, relate, and live—a transformation that literature is uniquely equipped to inspire and guide.

References

- Bacigalupi, P. (2015). *The Water Knife*. Orbit.
- Buell, L. (1995). *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Connolly, J., & Prothero, A. (2008). Green Consumption: Life-politics, risk and contradictions. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, *8*(1), 117–145.
- Foster, J. B. (2000). *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature*. Monthly Review Press.
- Glotfelty, C., & Fromm, H. (Eds.). (1996). *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. University of Georgia Press.
- Lefteri, C. (2019). *The Beekeeper of Aleppo*. Ballantine Books.

Nixon, R. (2011). *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard University Press.

Powers, R. (2018). *The Overstory*. W. W. Norton & Company.

Waxman, A. (2017). *The Garden of Small Beginnings*. Penguin Books.