

**NATURE AS A LIVING PRESENCE IN GILL LEWIS’  
EAGLE WARRIOR: AN ECO-CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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**ABSTRACT:**

Ecocriticism is a literary theory that describes an interdisciplinary and environmentally oriented critical approach and examines the relationships between human beings and the natural world. Gill Lewis’ novel *Eagle Warrior* (2020) explores nature and blends fast-paced adventure with strong environmental themes. The novel portrays nature as an active force rather than a static backdrop. The study explores how Lewis represents the Scottish Highland landscape and the golden eagle as an active agent that destabilizes anthropocentric ideologies, foregrounding nonhuman vitality within the natural world. Putting forth ecocritical theories, the study analyses the novel’s representation of wildlife and eco-centric ethics. The study contends how *Eagle Warrior* amplifies ecological voices by endowing nonhuman existence with moral and narrative value, positioning the child protagonist as a mediator who connects human society with nature. Ultimately, the novel illustrates how children’s literature serves as an effective medium for fostering environmental awareness and ecological responsibility through a detailed portrayal of natural landscapes.

**KEYWORDS:**

Eco-Criticism, non-human, eco-centric ethics, anthropocentric, mediator, destabilizes, vitality.



Ecocriticism is an interdisciplinary literary theory that studies the relationship between nature and literature. It is one of the most important theories in the twenty-first century. It also deals with the issues of social justice and equity. It seeks to enrich and harmonize the values of human communities with those of the natural world, fostering a deeper ethical awareness of humanity's relationship with the environment. It has reinforced the intimate bond between humans and nature, emphasising their interdependence and promoting a holistic understanding of life on Earth.

British author and former veterinarian Gill Lewis's deep commitment to animals and the natural environment is evident in her literary works. Prior to establishing herself as a writer of children's fiction, Lewis spent a significant part of her professional career working with animals in the United Kingdom and in diverse regions across the globe, ranging from Africa to the Arctic. This extensive firsthand experience with wildlife and ecological systems profoundly informs her writing. Her novels including *White Dolphin*, *Sky Hawk*, *Moon Bear*, *Gorilla Dawn*, and *Scarlet Ibis* have been widely acclaimed for their engaging narratives and strong environmental consciousness.

The escalating environmental crises of the twenty-first century have underscored the urgency of re-evaluating anthropocentric worldviews and promoting more sustainable modes of coexistence with nature. As a literary and cultural theory, Ecocriticism investigates the interconnections between textual representation and the physical environment, foregrounding literature's role in shaping environmental perception and ethics. According to Laurence Buell, "Ecocriticism investigates the relationship between literature and the physical environment, emphasizing literature's role in challenging anthropocentric perspectives and foregrounding the ethical dimensions of human engagement with nature."

Gill Lewis's *Eagle Warrior* addresses the themes of wildlife

conservation, habitat destruction, and cultural reverence for nature through the experiential lens of a young protagonist. The novel transcends conventional background settings by presenting nature as a living, sentient presence whose well-being is inextricably linked to human behaviour. The paper examines Gill Lewis's *Eagle Warrior* from an ecocritical perspective, focusing on how the novel animates nature and positions it as a central, active force within the narrative. It argues that Lewis's portrayal of the natural world cultivates ecological empathy and challenges anthropocentric assumptions by privileging coexistence and interdependence over domination and control. The article examines *Eagle Warrior* from an ecocritical perspective, focusing on how the novel constructs nature as an agentive force within the story. It argues that Lewis's portrayal of landscape and wildlife fosters ecological empathy and challenges anthropocentric worldviews by promoting coexistence, interdependence, and environmental responsibility.

In *Eagle Warrior*, landscapes function not as static settings but as living spaces that actively shape the characters' experiences and identities. "There are some places in Scotland and where they have stopped shooting grouse and are letting the wild come back" (82). This representation aligns with Cheryll Glotfelty's assertion that Ecocriticism foregrounds the interconnected relationship between literature and the physical environment, recognising nature as an active presence rather than a passive backdrop. Lewis's evocative descriptions of mountains, skies, forests, and rivers emphasise movement, sound, and emotional resonance, that suggest a living, responsive natural world. "She watched the cloud shadows slide across the valley floor. The river glittered gold in the evening light and the sky was tinted with pink" (82). Such a portrayal reflects Lawrence Buell's argument that environmentally oriented texts grant the non-human world a degree of agency and ethical significance. Furthermore, as Greg Garrard notes, ecocritical narratives often depict wilderness as both inspiring and endangered; similarly, *Eagle Warrior* presents the natural landscape as majestic

yet fragile, evoking awe while simultaneously exposing the damaging consequences of human intrusion and ecological disruption.

In *Eagle Warrior*, landscape is not a neutral or decorative setting but a materially and ethically charged space that actively participates in the formation of character, identity, and moral consciousness. This narrative strategy resonates with Cheryll Glotfelty's foundational claim that ecocriticism repositions the physical environment from the margins of literary analysis to its conceptual center, recognizing nature as an agentive presence within textual meaning-making. Lewis's sensory-rich depictions of mountains, skies, forests, and rivers, marked by movement, sound, and affective intensity, construct what Lawrence Buell terms an "environmentally responsive text," one in which the non-human world possesses narrative presence, temporal depth, and ethical significance rather than functioning as a passive backdrop. Moreover, the novel's portrayal of wilderness as simultaneously awe-inspiring and vulnerable reflects Greg Garrard's ecocritical understanding of nature as a contested site shaped by cultural values, ecological precarity, and human intervention. By foregrounding the fragility of these landscapes in the face of anthropogenic intrusion, Lewis destabilises anthropocentric hierarchies and advances an eco-centric worldview that emphasises relationality, ecological interdependence, and moral accountability within human-nature interactions.

From an ecocritical standpoint, such a vivid portrayal destabilises the traditional anthropocentric literary hierarchy that privileges human subjectivity while relegating nature to a peripheral, instrumental role. In *Eagle Warrior*, the landscape exerts discernible agency, shaping the characters' ethical orientations, emotional trajectories, and narrative choices. This narrative attribution of influence to the non-human world corresponds with ecocritical imperatives, articulated by theorists such as Buell and Glotfelty, to reconceptualize the environment as an active, meaning-producing participant within literary discourse rather than as a passive resource or inert backdrop. By granting the land narrative force, Lewis

advances an ecocentric aesthetic that reimagines human identity as relational and embedded within broader ecological systems.

In *Eagle Warrior*, animals, particularly the eagle, are represented as sentient, agentic beings endowed with symbolic, ethical, and ecological significance. The eagle operates not merely as an emblem of freedom and equilibrium but as a fragile node within an ecosystem rendered vulnerable by anthropogenic exploitation. Such representation aligns with ecocritical imperatives to reposition animals as subjects of moral consideration rather than as instrumentalized objects within human-centred frameworks, thereby challenging utilitarian and extractivist approaches to wildlife.

Lewis foregrounds the material and ethical consequences of habitat destruction and human greed, demonstrating how ecological violence reverberates across interconnected biological and cultural systems. This narrative emphasis on interdependence reflects Greg Garrard's assertion that ecocritical texts expose the complex entanglements binding human and non-human life. By cultivating affective engagement with animal suffering, *Eagle Warrior* advances a biocentric ethic that insists upon humanity's moral accountability to the more-than-human world and destabilizes entrenched anthropocentric hierarchies.

In *Eagle Warrior*, landscape operates not as a static or decorative backdrop but as a dynamic, meaning-producing presence that actively shapes character formation and narrative trajectory. Lewis' rich sensory depictions of mountains, skies, forests, and rivers marked by movement, sound, and affective intensity construct what Lawrence Buell identifies as "The non-human world is represented as having agency and significance beyond its usefulness to humans" (99), wherein the non-human world possesses narrative agency, ethical resonance, and interpretive significance. The environment, in this sense, becomes integral to the novel's moral and emotional economy rather than ancillary to human action. As per Lawrence Buell, "An environmentally oriented work must

imagine the non-human environment as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history” (7). One could find the above statements appropriate in Gill Lewis’ *Eagle Warrior*.

From an ecocritical perspective, such representation destabilises entrenched anthropocentric literary hierarchies that privilege human subjectivity while relegating nature to the margins as an inert backdrop or exploitable resource. The land in *Eagle Warrior* exerts formative influence over the characters’ decisions, ethical orientations, and emotional development, thereby articulating a relational ontology in which human identity is constituted through ongoing entanglement with ecological systems. By attributing narrative agency to landscape, Lewis reconceptualizes nature as an active participant in meaning-making processes, advancing an eco-centric worldview that foregrounds interdependence, embeddedness, and environmental responsibility.

In *Eagle Warrior*, the eagle is represented as a sentient, agentive being endowed with symbolic, ethical, and ecological significance. The eagle functions not merely as a metaphor for freedom and balance but as a vulnerable ecological subject whose precarity foregrounds the fragility of ecosystems threatened by anthropogenic exploitation. Such representation resonates with ecocritical and animal studies that seek to dismantle the objectification of non-human life, repositioning animals as subjects of moral consideration rather than as instrumental resources within utilitarian frameworks.

Lewis further foregrounds the material and ethical consequences of habitat destruction and human greed, illustrating how environmental harm reverberates across interconnected ecological and social systems. This sustained emphasis on interdependence reflects Greg Garrard’s assertion that ecocritical narratives expose the complex entanglements binding human and non-human life. By cultivating affective engagement with animal

suffering, *Eagle Warrior* advances a biocentric ethic that underscores humanity's moral accountability to the more-than-human world, thereby challenging entrenched anthropocentric hierarchies and affirming the intrinsic value of non-human existence.

In *Eagle Warrior*, nature functions as a central, living force that shapes the narrative, characters, and ethical framework of the novel. Rather than serving as a passive backdrop, the natural environment operates as an active, meaning-producing presence that influences character development and moral decision-making. Landscapes such as mountains, forests, skies, and rivers are rendered with sensory intensity, emphasising their vitality, vulnerability, and emotional resonance. Through this depiction, nature emerges as an agentic entity intricately connected to human actions and consequences.

Animals, most notably the eagle, further consolidate nature's central and agentic role in *Eagle Warrior*. The eagle functions not as a mere symbolic abstraction but as an ecological subject whose embodied presence signifies both freedom and ecological vulnerability. Its exposure to habitat loss and human interference foregrounds the material consequences of anthropogenic exploitation, thereby challenging utilitarian and instrumentalist conceptions of wildlife. By representing animals as sentient beings endowed with intrinsic value, Lewis aligns her narrative with ecocritical and animal ethics discourses that seek to dismantle human exceptionalism and to affirm the moral significance of non-human life. This narrative strategy cultivates ecological empathy and advances a biocentric ethic grounded in responsibility, care, and interdependence.

Moreover, *Eagle Warrior* exposes the destructive repercussions of human greed and environmental negligence by illustrating how ecological damage reverberates across interconnected human and non-human communities. Environmental harm is not depicted as isolated or abstract but as relational and systemic, reinforcing the ecocritical principle that ecological crises are inseparable from

cultural and ethical failures. This sustained emphasis on interdependence echoes Greg Garrard's assertion that ecocritical narratives reveal the complex entanglements binding culture and nature, thereby unsettling binaries that separate the human from the natural. By portraying nature as simultaneously resilient and fragile, Lewis destabilizes hierarchical human-nature oppositions and advances an eco-centric worldview predicated on coexistence, reciprocity, and ethical restraint rather than domination.

Ultimately, the role of nature in *Eagle Warrior* extends beyond thematic representation to assume a formative pedagogical function. As a work of children's literature, the novel mobilizes narrative affect and identification to cultivate environmental awareness and ethical responsibility in young readers. By constructing nature as a living presence endowed with agency, value, and vulnerability, *Eagle Warrior* participates in the broader project of eco-critical literature that seeks not only to represent environmental crisis but also to reimagine human-nature relations and to promote sustainable, ethically grounded modes of engagement with the more-than-human world.

Gill Lewis's *Eagle Warrior* exemplifies eco-conscious children's fiction that reconceptualizes nature as a living, agentive presence rather than a passive backdrop to human action. Through its dynamic representation of landscape, ethically charged portrayals of non-human life, and sustained emphasis on ecological interconnectedness, the novel destabilizes anthropocentric assumptions and advances an eco-centric ethic grounded in care, relationality, and environmental responsibility.

An ecocritical reading of *Eagle Warrior* reveals the text's capacity to cultivate ecological awareness and moral reflexivity among young readers by embedding environmental ethics within an affectively engaging narrative framework. By positioning nature as an active force in the shaping of character, value, and consequence, Lewis contributes to environmental literature that not only registers

contemporary ecological crises but also seeks to reorient modes of perception and being toward more sustainable, ethically accountable relationships with the human world.

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