



A Literary Perspective on Guerrilla Gardening as a Tool for Regreening the Planet

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ABSTRACT

Guerrilla gardening has emerged as a grassroots ecological practice that challenges urban neglect, environmental degradation, and unequal access to green spaces through unauthorized cultivation and rewilding. This paper offers a literary perspective on guerrilla gardening as a tool for regreening the planet, situating the practice within the theoretical framework of ecocriticism. By examining literary representations of environmental activism, the study highlights the role of narrative in cultivating green consciousness and sustainable hope. Eleanor Catton's *Birnam Wood* is taken as a central contemporary text to explore how guerrilla gardening functions as ecological resistance, interrogating issues of land ownership, power structures, capitalism, and ethical responsibility toward nature. Through close textual analysis and ecocritical interpretation, the paper argues that literature not only reflects ecological concerns but also actively participates in shaping environmental awareness and motivating collective ecological action.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Guerrilla Gardening, Regreening the Planet, Environmental Resistance.

Introduction:

The idea of regreening the planet has attracted recent interest in the context of debates on the anthropocene and gardening is considered as an activity characterised by attentiveness to nature and an act to preserve it. The anthropocene has become a familiar topic among the people who care for nature and its return to the well-being of the humanity. Environmental degradation, climate change, invasive species and deforestation has become great challenges for the existing world. In order to give a solution to these above mentioned issues, guerrilla gardening is considered to be an effective solution, and it has received support

from a lot of activists who practiced it. Guerrilla gardening is often practiced without getting prior permission from the land owners and it connotes a compelling challenge to the hegemonic mechanisms of the control of land and ecological destruction.

The term for the widely known ‘guerrilla gardening’ was coined in the 1970s by Liz Christy and a group of her friends from New York City who were working to rehabilitate vacant city-owned lots, however, the history of guerrilla gardening in action looks a lot different than the historical one. Bowery – Houston Community farm was an example of guerrilla gardening. During that time, activists threw seed bombs in a vacant lot at the corner of Bowery and Houston Street, which later transformed into a community farm and garden. The process of making seed bombs is by mixing seeds, soil and water together. It was an innovative way to plant something without the knowledge of the land owners.

Guerrilla Gardening:

The word guerrilla gardening was derived from the words ‘Gardening and ‘Guerrilla’ where ‘Gardening’ signifies cultivation, regeneration and care, whereas ‘Guerrilla’ signifies warfare, grassroots and non-institutional action. It was a challenging work for the activists during a time when the land owners were very forceful to take necessary actions when somebody unknowingly involved with their land. Many a time, the activists who were caught were punished cruelly by the land owners.

Literature is a very powerful medium where ethical dilemmas, ecological anxieties and visions of environmental restoration are uttered. It has always been a reflection of the real world situation written by the writers. Many themes related to ecological issues such as pastoral traditions, climate change issues, invasive species and deforestation have been addressed by the writers in their oeuvres. In the current world, ecological concerns have emerged as an important area of interest which explains the relationship between the foregrounding issues of sustainability, ecological consciousness, environmental justice and the physical environment. Through the literary works, the human responsibility towards nature and their understanding has been shaped. This paper tries to examine the process of guerrilla gardening, a major strategy for greening the planet, by throwing the focus on Eleanor Catton’s literary work *Birnam Wood*.

Eleanor Catton is a well known international screenwriter and novelist, who is famous for her complex narrative structures and literary craftsmanship. She was born in the year 1985 in Canada and she is very much famous for her previous novel *The Luminaries*, which explained clearly about the New Zealand

gold rush. She is also the winner of the Man Booker Prize (2013), which she received at the age of twenty eight and has become the youngest writer to win the prize.

Guerrilla Gardening as a Tool for Regreening the Planet:

Birnam Wood is a literary work of Eleanor Catton, which is a political, ethical and ecological thriller published in the year 2023. The title of this book is imitated from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* which symbolises the unsettling power of nature and deception when mustered against authority. It is relevant to sustainable studies, environmental ethics, ecofeminism and green activism. A team of members in this novel join together to utilise the unused lands to plant trees, saplings and create vegetable garden. Mira is the protagonist, who is a member of the team named 'Birnam Wood'. She accompanies her friends to identify unused lands to plant trees, saplings and vegetable seeds. This way she helps the needy people of her community by distributing the produce.

One fine day, Mira was planting seeds in the dirt. The act of planting seeds in dirt is taken as a powerful gesture of ecological transformation of an ordinary action into environmental care. This act symbolises sustainable hope and human engagement with the nature to emphasise responsibility rather than ownership. Mira has faced many challenges while doing this planting for so many years. Each season brought its unique challenges and each crop behaved in a different way. Her group cultivated eighteen different plots of land around the city which were in the gardens of old age homes, preschools, parking lot of a dental clinic and in the yards of the rented student flats. In exchange of the mains water for the process and the land space occupied, the hosts were given half of the produce and the other half will be distributed to the needy people. Mira's ambition for Birnam wood was a long lasting social change which will be fair enough if the people understood the importance of the fertile land begging for cultivation. She felt that if this change occurs, everybody will be getting enough produce and the land too will be utilised instead of remaining unfertile.

The team members of Birnam wood kept track of all their interlocking schedules of weeding, cultivation, watering and recorded where they stored their tools. Whatever they planted was without the permission from the land owners, unattended lands, fence lines, near motorway off ramps, demolition sites and in the junkyards. In order to avoid getting caught, they do guerrilla gardening in the very early mornings. For watering the plants, they depended on collecting rainwater, dredging ponds and rivers. They took great care not to identify themselves at any cost.

Sometimes, when they visit the plantation site, the owners would have doused them with weed killer or they would have burned. Still nothing would stop them and they would continue their routine in some other place. Mira would collect the cuttings from suburban gardens, leaf litters out of public parks and manure from farmlands. She would also steal scions from commercial apple orchards and planting equipments from unlocked garden sheds. She was into gardening from her childhood days where her parents had kept a compost heap to reduce the volume of their household waste. The backyard of Mira's home was mostly like a lawn. There was a sandpit, where her mother planted some cherry tomatoes after she insisted her mother to plant them. When she became vigorously occupied with the plantation process, she had two dozen different crops in germination and extended her garden to the full length of the fence. She planted marigolds, followed crop rotations and saved the coffee grounds for mulch.

During ecological crisis, the practice of guerrilla gardening plays a pivotal part by representing hope and renewal. It is considered as a regreening process which exemplifies the belief that the processes followed by individual or collectively contribute to the well-being of the environment. It becomes a gesture of resistance against the destruction of the environment and an assurance to sustainable future. By integrating guerrilla gardening into literary analysis, an active ecological engagement and environmental awareness may be shifted to the readers.

Literature as a Catalyst for Green Consciousness:

The study of the relationship between the physical environment and literature has been dealt with by many writers such as Cheryll Glotfelty and Elaenor Catton. Ecological relationships and nature is represented in many novels throughout the world and ecocriticism is considered as an essential scaffold that examines the ways they are interconnected. An anthropocentric view is challenged enough by the ecocritical thoughts and seeks for a more environmentally accountable style of living and reading.

Environmental exploitation, industrialisation and unchecked capitalism narratives in literature are often within ecocritical discourse. Marginalised ecological voices are articulated in the parts of literary texts. While viewing guerrilla gardening through an ecocritical view, it functions as a practical act of resistance against ecological neglect. The right of communities to nurture and restore the environment, and the narratives of land ownership are disrupted. The act of planting and reclamation of land as moral and political interventions are captured as the spirit of regreening by the literary works. Guerrilla gardening exceeds its

physical practice and transforms into a metaphor for environmental consciousness and transformation through storytelling.

Literary texts always inspire the readers to be familiar with the transformative latent of everyday environmental actions, by considering the practice of guerrilla gardening as a way of caring for the nature and resistance. Catton's *Birnam wood* is considered one of the most prominent novels which describe the practice of guerrilla gardening. The novel urges the readers to practice guerrilla gardening in their respective places and share it with their community for the need of sustainability and resistance.

Conclusion:

In the contemporary age, where the environmental degradation is considered to be high, guerrilla gardening may be an eye opener for the ecological crisis. This paper significantly analyses guerrilla gardening as an influential environmental and literary medium. Eleanor Catton has explained the practice of guerrilla gardening in her novel as a solution for the ecological crisis and how it paves way for the greening of unused earth. This study underscores that guerrilla gardening purposes environmental resistance, demanding predominant structures of using land and exploitation of the environment. This paper depicts those literary texts which deal with the ecological conscious practices gives a reason to believe in green consciousness and sustainable hope.

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