

Solastlgia and Ecological Grief in Emmi Itäranta's *The Memory of Water: An Ecostylistic Analysis*

Syeda Okasha Mahmood¹

Abstract

Climate change and environmental degradation have come to be more and more a theme in modern literature, especially what has come to be known as “climate fiction”, which depicts the emotional and psychological effects of environmental catastrophe. The study will focus on aspects of language and style in the novel as they show emotional reactions to environmental destruction and to trauma caused by climate change. This study uses the qualitative research method and a text analysis approach as the main tool for the study. Using the theoretical framework of ecostylistics, imagery, symbolism, diction and tone are analyzed in the novel. The emotions of the characters, their displacement and ecological anxiety in the context of the water scarcity and environmental instability are discussed in the context of the concepts of solastalgia and ecological grief. The results show that in the novel, dystopian features and ecostyle serve to effectively depict the ecological grief and solastalgia. Images of water symbolize memory, survival and ecological interconnectedness, and depictions of landscape and water scarcity are associated with environmental degradation. Moreover, the melancholic language and tone help convey the emotional stress and psychological anguish resulting from climate change. The overall conclusion of the study is that *The Memory of Water* is an effective fusion of ecology, style and emotion and a meaningful piece of climate fiction. The research also shows that ecostylistics is a good approach to analyzing the emotion of the environment and environmental representation in literary works.

Keywords: Solastalgia, Ecological Grief, Ecostylistics, Climate Fiction, Environmental Degradation, *The Memory of Water*

¹Department of English, COMSATS University, Islamabad – Pakistan

Introduction

Climate change has emerged as one of the most pressing issues of our time and it is profoundly impacting the world's ecosystems, societies, and mental health. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2023) identified environmental degradation as the main challenge being faced as a result of human activities and processes of industrialization, high carbon emissions and the use of natural resources without considering their sustainable management. These changes have led to global warming, water scarcity, biodiversity loss, melting glaciers and extreme climate events that lead to ecological instability and human vulnerability.

In addition to the scientific and environmental aspect, climate change is a significant topic in the field of literature and cultural studies. Ecocriticism examines the representation of the human/environmental dynamic in literary texts. Cheryll Glotfelty describes ecocriticism as the analysis of the connection between literature and the natural world, and Lawrence Buell notes that environmental literature is an important factor in developing ecological consciousness and ecological imagination.

Climate change brings with it emotional/psychological impacts as well as environmental impacts. Anxiety, feeling a lack of control, grief and emotional displacement are common reactions to environmental devastation, loss of resources and climate disaster. In this context Glenn Albrecht coined the term solastalgia, which is a distressing feeling when one's home environment is adversely affected whilst in residence. In the same way, ecological grief is an emotional response to ecological loss, extinction and environmental degradation (Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018). The following are some of the emotional relationships between man and nature identified in these concepts.

A new and important genre of climate fiction (cli-fi) literature has surfaced that focuses on the social, environmental, and psychological consequences of climate change. Climate fiction is also a way of depicting environmental futures, as well as current ecological uneasiness, and is the subject of scholarly discussion by Adam Trexler and Ursula K. Heise. Climate change is a scientific and emotional experience, as these stories frequently involve dystopian worlds, with resources depleted, the environment in peril, and social instability taking the place of social cohesion.

Emmi Itäranta's *The Memory of Water* can be considered an important climate fiction work in this context. The novel depicts a future world where water is a tightly

managed and limited commodity, influencing social structures, identities, and livelihoods. The narrative is grounded in issues of environmental destruction, memory, secrets and natural emotional connections through the character of Noria Kaitio. Water is a symbol of life, continuity, ecological interconnectedness and of the lack of it, ecological collapse and human vulnerability.

The current study uses an ecostylistic approach to examine the use of language and style in the novel in the construction of ecological meanings and emotional reactions. Ecostylistics is an approach to the study of language that brings together the methods of ecocriticism and stylistics, which looks at the ways in which language functions to present environmental concerns in terms of imagery, symbolism, diction, and tone. In this way, the study aims to explore the novel's depiction of solastalgia and ecological grief as emotional reactions to environmental degradation and climate change.

This study is important as it discusses the emotional and psychological experiences of climate change as part of solastalgia and ecological grief in *The Memory of Water*. It analyzes eco-trauma and environmental anxiety in the context of climate fiction to make a contribution to the environmental humanities. The study also uses an ecostylistic method which examines linguistic and stylistic elements like imagery, symbolism, diction and tone. In this way, it exposes the ways in which literary language creates ecological meaning and feelings of environmental destruction. Besides, the findings expand the possibilities of climate fiction and ecocritical studies with a specific examination of ecological emotions and a broader discussion of literature, ecology and psychology.

This study is restricted to the ecostylistic analysis of *The Memory of Water* with particular interest on how solastalgia and ecological grief are portrayed in the novel. The research is qualitative and the results obtained can be used only for the text studied and cannot be extrapolated to other literary texts. The study is primarily focused on the stylistic elements of imagery, symbolism and diction, and the tone; other elements of literature, such as character development, plot structure, and socio-political issues are explored less. Furthermore, the theoretical frameworks of 'ecostylistics' and 'solastalgia' and 'ecological grief' themselves limit the interpretation of the novel in a wider interdisciplinary sense.

Review of the Literature

❖ Ecocriticism and Environmental Literature

Ecocriticism is one of the methods of literature in which the relationship between the literature and the nature is studied. It emphasizes the portrayal of nature, ecology and people's relationship with the environment in texts. According to Cherryll Glotfelty, ecocriticism is the examination of literature and the natural world (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996). Likewise, Lawrence Buell points out that environmental writing contributes to the cultivation of ecological sensibility and to a shift from anthropocentric thinking (Buell, 1995). Through this, ecocriticism draws attention to the role of literature in understanding environmental ethics, ecological crises, and human responsibility for the environment. Greg Garrard also notes that environmental literature does often talk of pollution, climate change and ecological degradation (Garrard, 2012).

❖ Climate Fiction

Climate fiction, also known as 'cli-fi', is a modern genre of fiction, which represents the environmental, social and psychological consequences of climate change. It frequently features dystopian or post-apocalyptic settings, where ecological disaster, scarcity of resources and instability have created a world that is different from the one we've known. Climate fiction is, as Adam Trexler puts it, a 'cultural form' that 'translates scientific concerns about climate change into emotional and narrative experience' (Trexler, 2015). Likewise, Ursula K. Heise says that cli-fi gives readers a chance to imagine a future for the environment and to comprehend the ecological risks in a story (Heise, 2016). Climate change is a physical and emotional experience, with these stories often involving human vulnerability, social inequality, and breakdown of the environment.

❖ Solastalgia and Ecological Grief

Individuals and communities are psychologically and emotionally impacted by the changes in the environment. Solastalgia is defined as 'distress caused by the negative transformation of one's home environment, while experiencing it from within' by Glenn Albrecht (2005). This involves a sense of loss, anxiety, powerlessness, and emotional absence from location. Environmental loss, extinction, and destruction resulting from climate change is associated with ecological grief, which is emotional damage (Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018). These are very common areas of application in

environmental humanities for their work to understand the impact of ecological crises on mental health, identity, memory, and emotional well-being. They also demonstrate that environmental harm affects more than just the body; it is an emotional impact.

❖ **Ecostylistics**

Ecostylistics is an interdisciplinary approach, which integrates the disciplines of ecocriticism and stylistics, into the analysis of the creation of ecological meaning in the text. It emphasizes style and language, imagery and symbolism, selection of words, tone, and narration. Language can impact on the way people think about nature, and language is how ecological awareness and attitudes towards the environment are formed (Stibbe, 2015). Similarly, Garrard (2012) stresses the need of literary devices in the representation of environmental issues and ecology awareness. By employing the method of ecostylistic analysis, the language can be interpreted as expressing environmental crisis and emotions like grief, anxiety and displacement.

❖ **Research Studies on The Memory of Water**

Emmi Itäranta's novel *The Memory of Water* has become a noted climate fiction and environmental dystopian novel. The novel portrays a future world which suffers from a scarcity of water, environmental degradation, and a tight control on the natural resources. It emphasizes its symbolic significance of water, the dystopian setting, and its emotional resonance in depicting ecological devastation and human vulnerability. Water, as a central symbol of life, memory, survival and ecological inter-relatedness, is also a symbol of a scarcity which represents a crisis in the environment and a control of the society.

Previous studies have examined the environmental and dystopian aspects of the novel, but there has been less research that has specifically considered emotional reactions like solastalgia and ecological grief as linguistically produced. Stylistic features and how they contribute to ecological meaning and emotional experience, in particular, have not been explored. This study thus looks at the ways in which linguistic and stylistic decisions in the novel shape ecological emotions and enact climate-induced trauma from an ecostylistic perspective.

Methodology

This study is a qualitative study to explore the representation of solastalgia and ecological grief in *The Memory of Water* as an ecostylistic representation. Qualitative research is not about statistics but about meanings, experiences and representations of texts. It is about the way in which the meaning of experience, social or human, is built by individuals or texts, as Creswell (2014) stated. The present study uses this method as it examines the literary language, emotional expression, and ecological representation in climate fiction.

The study is of an interpretive and descriptive approach. Its purpose is to examine how the environmental degradation and ecological emotions are built in the selected novel through language. Focal point on ecostylistic devices like imagery, symbolism, diction, metaphor and tone to represent ecological crisis, emotional suffering and psychological distress induced by environmental change. The design is an opportunity to examine literary language in-depth as it creates meaning concerning climate change and ecological trauma.

The research method is mainly textual analysis. Textual analysis is the process of interpreting the meaning of texts through analysing the language, structure and representation used in the production of meaning (McKee, 2003). For this study, close reading is done on extracts from the novel which illustrate environmental destruction, water shortage and emotional response to environmental instability. The passages are examined to determine a regularity of language and style in the creation of solastalgia and ecological grief in the narrative.

Ecostylistics, which is a combination of the two disciplines of ecocriticism and stylistics, is the theoretical foundation of the present study as it deals with the construction of ecological meaning in language. Language is extremely important in forming attitudes towards nature and environmental awareness and Arran Stibbe draws attention to this point (Stibbe, 2015). Likewise, Greg Garrard points out the need for literary representation in establishing ecological consciousness and grasping environmental crisis (Garrard, 2012). The study explores the contribution of the stylistic features of the novel to the perception of ecology and emotional meaning according to the idea.

The book that was selected for analysis was *The Memory of Water*, as it was a book that strongly represented the themes of climate change, environmental collapse, and water scarcity. The use of language in the novel is symbolic and poetic, making

this a rich site for ecostylistic analysis. It is the story of a dystopian society, one in which environmental degradation becomes a determinant of social structure, identity and survival. It is a particularly good book to address ecological emotions and the use of language because of its narrative style and images.

Specific linguistic and stylistic elements are the subject of study, such as imagery, symbolism, diction, metaphor and tone. Images are studied to explain the visual and sensory depiction of environmental degradation and deprivation. The use of symbolism particularly that of water, in relation to memory, life and ecological interconnection is explored. Diction and metaphor are discussed, as well as the way that word choice and figurative language communicate ecological concerns and emotional pain. Tone is also explored to expose the novel's general mood of despair, anxiety and ecological uncertainty.

The analytical approach includes a close reading of the text, an excerpting of the relevant text, and detailed interpretation based on the eco stylistic, solastalgia and ecological grief lenses. For each selected passage, the features that are found in the language and style are examined and then interpreted in the context of environmental crisis and emotional response. The analysis will be used to demonstrate the ways in which language builds meaning around ecology and how language represents the psychological experiences of environmental change.

The study is just one ecostylistic qualitative analysis of a literary text and is not expanded in comparative, quantitative or interdisciplinary directions towards political and/or sociological aspects. It still concentrates on ecological feelings and linguistic depiction of environmental crisis in the chosen novel.

Analysis

The *Memory of Water* has been analysed to show how this novel can be a powerful representation of solastalgia and ecological grief through its ecostylistic construction and dystopian setting. The environment, water scarcity, and ecological collapse play significant roles in shaping the story's themes, affecting the characters' emotional and psychological states. The study demonstrates that climate change in the novel is not only a physical crisis, but an emotional and psychological one as well, and that this new crisis brings fear, uncertainty, grief and a sense of disassociation.

The results show that the aspects of language and style, including imagery, symbolism, diction, tone and metaphor play a pivotal role in creating meaning of

ecology. Barren landscapes, dry environments, systems of controlled water are all descriptions that are used multiple times throughout the novel to convey environmental destruction. These stylistic decisions evoke a sense of ecological precarity and emotional discomfort and make it possible for readers to experience climate trauma through language.

Water appears as the most important ecostylistic feature that is both literal and symbolic in nature. It is a symbol of life, memory, survival and ecological connection, and its scarcity is indicative of ecological imbalance and human vulnerability. From abundance to scarcity, ecological grief and solastalgia becomes more emotional.

The novel, as a whole, has a language of literature that is not only descriptive of environmental collapse but also is engaged in creating emotional involvement within the ecological crisis. It sees climate trauma as a condition of both humankind and nature.

Solastalgia and Ecological Grief

This novel is highly evocative of a feeling of "solastalgia," which Glenn Albrecht describes as "the distress that comes from the loss of place. While characters in the novel continue to suffer emotionally while living in the crumbling homeland, the sense of helplessness, anxiety, and alienation from environment is heightened.

Mourning for the loss of an ecological balance and environmental destruction and extinction are also clearly seen as forms of ecological grief (Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018). The characters' emotional reactions indicate that loss in the environment is not just material, but psychological as well. The dystopian setting helps to amplify these feelings as safety, predictability and comfort are all taken away from nature.

Imagery and Environmental Degradation

One of the most prevalent of the stylistic devices in the novel is imagery. The constant themes of dry land, lack of resources, silence and environmental degradation evoke a dystopian mood. Garrard (2012) argues that symbolic imagery has been a common feature in environmental literature that is employed to draw attention to ecological crisis and human vulnerability. In the novel, sensory imagery adds to the emotional impact of environmental collapse and helps the reader to visualize a destroyed environment.

Symbolism of Water

Water is the novel's main symbol and means a lot of things, from life to memory, identity to ecological continuity. But its rarity makes it a sign of fear, control and emotional pain. Based on the discussion of Lawrence Buell, the representation of environment in literature is the expression of human beings' dependence on environment and consciousness of environment (Buell, 1995). The symbolic shift from water abundance to water shortage is indicative of ecology grief and psychological instability.

Diction and Tone

The language of the novel is simple but emotionally charged, with a tone of despair and concern for the environment. The terms used to describe dryness, silence, disappearance, limitation, etc., are suggestive of environmental collapse. The mood is uniformly gloomy and understated, adding to the emotional impact of the story. According to Arran Stibbe, the perception of the environment and emotions towards the environment are influenced by language (Stibbe, 2015).

Tone and dystopian atmosphere

The tone, setting, and the way the novel is written create the dystopian atmosphere. Describes a world full of fear and uncertainty, and broken environments. Timothy Morton claims that the climate change creates existential uncertainty and emotional disturbance and that this is manifested in literary depictions of ecological crisis. The novel reflects this instability in its quiet, reflective and emotionally charged narration.

Ecostylistic Representation of Climate Trauma

The collaboration of these ecostylistic elements reveals a psychological and environmental climate trauma in the novel. The combination of imagery, symbolism, diction and tone all contribute to the representation of ecological animosity and emotional distress. The ecostylistic perspective emphasizes the role of language in creating meanings about the environment and evoking emotional reactions to climate change.

Conclusion

Overall, the study finds that *The Memory of Water* is a good literary expression of the concepts of solastalgia and ecological grief, successfully transmitted by

ecostylistic means. The novel illustrates that ecological destruction is not just a material one but also an emotional and psychological one which has a strong impact on human identity, memory and emotional stability.

The results reveal that the use of stylistic techniques such as imagery, symbolism, diction, tone, and metaphor play a crucial role in the creation of ecological meaning in the text. Especially, water symbolism is a central element in the expression of ecological dependence/ecological loss. Environmental abundance to scarcity is an emotional change from stability to grief and anxiety.

The dystopian setting and melancholic tone also amplify the emotional impact of climate trauma, as the story details. Fears, helplessness and displacement are described in characters' experiences, which show the impact of ecological collapse on mental and emotional well-being. This helps to reinforce the notion that ecological crisis is complexly intertwined with psychological reactions like solastalgia, anxiety and grief.

The research overall shows that ecostylistics is a very effective analytical tool for analysing climate fiction and demonstrates how literary language creates environmental meaning and emotional depth. Overall, the novel is a compelling and inventive work that successfully weaves together ecological themes with linguistic experimentation and emotional expression, adding to the growing body of climate fiction and environmental literature.

References

- Albrecht, G. (2005). Solastalgia: A new concept in health and identity. *PAN: Philosophy Activism Nature*, 3, 41–55.
- Buell, L. (1995). *The environmental imagination: Thoreau, nature writing, and the formation of American culture*. Harvard University Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Cunsolo, A., & Ellis, N. R. (2018). Ecological grief as a mental health response to climate change-related loss. *Nature Climate Change*, 8(4), 275–281. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-018-0092-2>
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. Longman.
- Garrard, G. (2012). *Ecocriticism* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Glotfelty, C., & Fromm, H. (Eds.). (1996). *The ecocriticism reader: Landmarks in literary ecology*. University of Georgia Press.
- Heise, U. K. (2016). *Imagining extinction: The cultural meanings of endangered species*. University of Chicago Press.
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. (2023). *Climate change 2023: Synthesis report*. IPCC.
- Itäranta, E. (2014). *The memory of water*. Harper Voyager.
- McKee, A. (2003). *Textual analysis: A beginner's guide*. Sage Publications.
- Morton, T. (2013). *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and ecology after the end of the world*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Stibbe, A. (2015). *Ecolinguistics: Language, ecology and the stories we live by*. Routledge.
- Trexler, A. (2015). *Anthropocene fictions: The novel in a time of climate change*. University of Virginia Press.

Article Information:

<i>Received</i>	9-Apr-2026
<i>Revised</i>	21-May-2026
<i>Accepted</i>	17-Jun-2026
<i>Published</i>	30-Jun-2026

Declarations:

Authors' Contribution:

- **Conceptualization, and intellectual revisions.**
- **Data collection, interpretation, and drafting of manuscript**
- The author agrees to take responsibility for every facet of the work, making sure that any concerns about its integrity or veracity are thoroughly examined and addressed

- **Conflict of Interest:** NIL

- **Funding Sources:** NIL

Correspondence:

Syeda Okasha Mahmood

Mehmoodokasha7@gmail.com
