The degrading environment of the planet is something that touches everyone. This book offers an introductory overview of literary and cultural criticism that concerns environmental crisis in some form. Both as a way of reading texts and as a theoretical approach to culture more generally, ‘ecocriticism’ is a varied and fast-changing set of practices which challenges inherited thinking and practice in the reading of literature and culture. This introduction defines what ecocriticism is, its methods, arguments and concepts, and will enable students to look at texts in a wholly new way. Boxed sections explain key critical terms and contemporary debates in the field with ‘hands-on’ examples and comparisons. Timothy Clark’s thoughtful approach makes this an ideal first encounter with environmental readings of literature.

The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment

TIMOTHY CLARK
Annelle
(For Anne)
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Preface

This book offers an introductory overview of the arguments, methods and concepts of literary and cultural criticism that concern environmental crisis in some form; a body of thought and work that is both varied and changing fast. A working definition of the subject, sometimes also called ‘ecocriticism’, would be: a study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment, usually considered from out of the current global environmental crisis and its revisionist challenge to given modes of thought and practice.

Introductions to environmental criticism have usually taken the form of critical anthologies in which the diversity of the issues is represented by a loose plurality of essays by different people. This study aims, ambitiously, for a tighter synthesis. The model is the kind of lucid conceptual introduction more familiar to other schools of literary or cultural theory, a systematic overview of the critical methods and arguments engaged with the intellectual and ethical challenges of environmental issues. The sequence of twenty short chapters includes readings of specific texts, inset box sections outlining some important concept or debate, a list of further reading and some inset sections called ‘quandaries’, open invitations to further thought.

Environmental issues pose new questions to inherited modes of thought and argument. To try to conceptualise and engage the multiple factors behind the accelerating degradation of the planet is to reach for tools that must be remade even in the process of use. Ecocriticism is one site of this crucial intellectual transformation.
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