

The Sea as a Representation of the Divine Spirit in Natalie Babbitt's Novel *The Eyes of the Amaryllis*: A Literary Ecocriticism Approach

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Abstract: This article explores how the sea is represented as a manifestation of the divine spirit in Natalie Babbitt's novel *The Eyes of the Amaryllis*. The sea, as both a setting and symbolic entity, reflects spiritual, ecological, and emotional dimensions throughout the narrative. Given the increasing urgency of environmental issues, particularly climate change and ecological alienation, this study emphasizes the importance of integrating eco-spiritual insights into literary analysis, especially in children's literature, which shapes early ethical perspectives. Although prior studies have addressed ecocriticism in children's fiction, few have examined how natural elements like the sea are portrayed as spiritual agents. This research aims to analyze the sea's divine attributes such as compassion, wrath, and transcendence as presented through the experiences of three generations of characters in the novel. Using a qualitative literary analysis method, the study conducts close readings of narrative passages, character development, and symbolic imagery, applying ecocriticism and spiritual ecology as theoretical frameworks. Findings reveal that Babbitt positions the sea as an active force that challenges anthropocentric views, calls for ecological humility, and invites spiritual reflection. The novel ultimately promotes a reimagined relationship between humans and nature that is rooted in empathy, reverence, and ecological awareness.

Keywords: children's literature, ecocriticism, spiritual ecology, sea

Abstrak: Artikel ini menganalisis bagaimana laut direpresentasikan sebagai manifestasi roh ilahi dalam novel "The Eyes of the Amaryllis" karya Natalie Babbitt. Laut, sebagai latar sekaligus entitas simbolik, mencerminkan dimensi spiritual, ekologis, dan emosional dalam keseluruhan narasi. Mengingat semakin mendesaknya isu lingkungan seperti perubahan iklim dan keterasingan manusia dari alam, penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya memasukkan perspektif ekospiritual dalam analisis sastra, terutama dalam sastra anak yang membentuk pandangan etis sejak dini. Meskipun beberapa penelitian sebelumnya telah membahas ekokritik dalam sastra anak, masih sedikit yang secara khusus menelaah bagaimana elemen alam seperti laut ditampilkan sebagai agen spiritual. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis atribut ilahi laut seperti kasih sayang, amarah, dan transendensi yang ditampilkan melalui pengalaman tiga generasi tokoh dalam novel. Dengan menggunakan metode analisis sastra kualitatif, studi ini melakukan pembacaan mendalam terhadap bagian-bagian naratif, perkembangan karakter, dan citra simbolik, serta menerapkan pendekatan teoritis ekokritik dan ekologi spiritual. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa Babbitt memposisikan laut sebagai kekuatan aktif yang menantang pandangan manusia-sentris, menyerukan kerendahan hati ekologis, dan mengundang refleksi spiritual. Novel ini pada akhirnya menawarkan imajinasi ulang atas hubungan manusia dengan alam yang didasarkan pada empati, rasa hormat, dan kesadaran ekologis.

Kata Kunci: ekokritik, ekologi spiritual, etika lingkungan, laut, sastra anak

1. INTRODUCTION

Natalie Babbitt's novel *The Eyes of the*

Amaryllis (1977) is an eerie story set by the ocean, intertwining themes of affection, grief, and the enigmatic force of nature. At its essence,

the narrative delves into a family's bond with the ocean; a grandmother (Geneva) who patiently remains by the shore for news of her husband, lost to the sea, her traumatized son who dreads the ocean, and a granddaughter (Jenny) who feels captivated by her grandmother's spiritual link to nature. Despite being penned in 1977 and taking place in a 19th-century setting, the novel's exploration of the sea as a symbol and the spirituality found in nature deeply connects with modern ecological concerns. Using an ecocritical perspective, which looks at literature related to the environment, readers can see connections between Babbitt's imagined ocean and actual issues such as climate change, the marine ecosystem crisis, ocean pollution, and changing human views of nature. As an ecocritical, Cheryll Glotfelty famously remarked, "Ecocriticism examines the relationship between literature and the natural world," it frequently seeks to link literary analysis to the current environmental crisis (C, 1996).

This research examines how *The Eyes of the Amaryllis* mirrors and highlights current ecological issues. Author explores the sea symbolism in the novel, its depiction of nature's spiritual aspect, and the evolving views of its characters about nature, referencing academic insights in ecocriticism, spiritual ecology, and environmental science. These links show that although it is fictional, Babbitt's story holds "ecological implications" important to the worldwide environmental crisis (Khomisah, 2020).

This study responds to the growing need to expand ecocritical discourse by incorporating

spiritual perspectives within environmental literature, especially in children's fiction. Although ecocriticism has developed robustly in recent decades, most studies have emphasized realism, environmental degradation, or anthropocentric critique. Few have examined how nature is framed as a divine or sacred presence, particularly in literature for younger readers. Babbitt's novel offers a compelling case for this focus, portraying the sea as an entity capable of emotional, moral, and spiritual influence.

Environmental literature frequently highlights the necessity for a change in worldview. For example, anthropocentrism is driving the ecological crisis and hastening extinction," and they "advocate ... ecocentrism" as a substitute (Djavari, 2018). Ecocentrism involves acknowledging the worth of all living beings and viewing humans as a component of nature rather than separate from it (Kurniawan & Yuwana, 2019).

Mary Evelyn Tucker, a scholar of religion and ecology, describes people's moment as one of "*lost connections, our grounding. Ecoanxiety engulfs us; climate grief enwraps us.*" These feelings of anxiety and grief stem from a realization that humanity have treated nature as dead matter, only to find that humanity have wounded something vital within the human condition (Tucker, 2014).

In Babbitt's novel, Geneva's faith in the sea and the ghostly Seward's reverence for the ocean's "meaning" illustrate what Berry and Tucker suggest, a recognition of the sacred or profound quality in nature. This recognition is

precisely what many environmental advocates say is needed today. Rather than viewing the ocean (and nature in general) as a resource, there is a growing call for ecological spirituality – seeing the Earth as a community of living beings people owe respect, even reverence. Juanda (2019) explained that storytelling of a literary work is not new. Many writers and poets use nature as a physical setting in the subject of storytelling and the choice of words, such as forests, seas, trees, and animals, in the literary genre they create, including children's literature.

In the novel, Jenny's journey can be interpreted as an ecocriticism awakening – she transitions from a human-centered perspective (at first, she arrives merely to assist her grandmother, not considering the sea deeply) to a realization that the sea possesses its narrative significance, and agency. This is in line with the description of Endraswara (2016) who states that the focus of literary ecocriticism is divided into (1) revealing the role of the environment in literary maps and (2) revealing the ecological message of literary texts. Literary ecocriticism assumes that the existence of literature exists in the middle of the environment. Literature belongs to the environment, and the environment is a loyal supporter of literature. Nature has become a part of literature. As depicted in this novel, the sea represents nature and the environment, which plays a vital role in moving the story very neatly and memorably. The sea is also a marker of other life in the story.

Ultimately, Jenny (along with the reader) recognizes that the ocean is more than merely a backdrop or a danger; it is a character deserving of a respectful relationship. This lesson pertains

to the current demand for a new environmental ethic. It reflects that addressing humanity crises necessitates compassion, bridging the gap between humanity and nature – a central theme in ecocriticism and eco-spiritual beliefs.

To map the position of this research with previous existing research, several relevant research presented, for example, an article entitled "Ecocriticism Analysis in the Eternal Novel by Jalu Kancana" written by S, Triyadi E Nurhasanah & A (2021) which focuses on the study of literary ecocriticism and represents natural elements in novels to voice ecological values and human spirituality towards the environment. Furthermore, the research written by Al Fawareh, A. J., Dakamsih, N. J., & Alkouri (2023) with the title "Ecocriticism in Modern English Literature" aims to elaborate on English literary works and presents theoretical and applicative studies of ecocriticism in modern English literature.

Then the article "The Representation of Literary Ecocriticism of Lawrance Buell's Perspective in the Novel *Planting is Against Widodo's Work*," written by Moh, Ruddin & S. (2024), emphasizes that the environment in literary works is not only the setting but also an active agent in the narrative by using Buell's perspective in the analysis process. Further research has also been produced by H.M. (2024) entitled "Ecocriticism and Children's Literature: *Dr. Seuss's The Lorax* as an Example," with a focus on the representation of nature in children's literature works that can bring philosophical, moral, and spiritual meaning through the ecocriticism approach. Finally, an article titled "Literary Ecocriticism on the Novel of *the Secret*

of the Rainbow by Baso, B. S., Herni, & D (2022) raises the elements of nature as representations of emotions, inner conflicts, and spiritual values. In addition, the use of corpus, which includes both children's literature, is also a slice of the research conducted. However, after surveying the existing scholarship, it appears that the object of research employing the focus addressed in the present study has not yet been investigated. This gap can be filled through the present research.

The previous research endeavors to explore the ecological dimensions and ethical reflections intertwined within the animated film *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs 2*. Employing a descriptive qualitative research methodology, this research contributes to the broader discourse on ecocriticism and cinematic narratives by unveiling the ecological and ethical facets woven into film. The study seeks to illuminate the film's role in shaping cultural attitudes towards nature, technology, and the delicate dance between humanity and the environment (Fitriansyah et al., 2024).

The Eyes of the Amaryllis (1977) is a children's novel by Natalie Babbitt. The story revolves around Geneva Reade's (Jenny's) visit to her grandmother's seaside house, where the loss of her grandfather at sea continues to affect her father, George. However, Grandmother Geneva believes that Amaryllis, which her husband sailed on, is still sailing under the sea. One day, during high tide, Jenny and Grandmother Geneva find part of the Amaryllis ship's figurehead, shaped like her grandmother's face. This discovery brings immense joy and

emotion to her grandmother. Unfortunately, a mysterious man named Seward suddenly arrives and instructs Grandmother Geneva to return the ship's figurehead to the sea. Seward is a guardian of the sea, ensuring that no "objects" from the sea reach the shore. Grandmother Geneva and Jenny refuse to return the item, resulting in a storm that destroys her home. Ultimately, Grandmother Geneva agrees to live with her son and grandchildren in Springfield, leaving her seaside house behind. Nature, especially the sea.

The sea is portrayed as having the power to shape the story and the characteristics of each character. For instance, Jenny, captivated by the sea's beauty, is depicted as a friendly character, while George, who has bad memories of the sea, is portrayed as a skeptic. The power of the sea demonstrates the ecocriticism perspective presented by the novel. Therefore, the authors argue that *The Eyes of the Amaryllis* emphasizes the ecocriticism view by presenting the sea as a representation of the divine spirit with divine attributes such as compassion and the ability to show its wrath.

This research responds to the growing need to expand ecocritical discourse by incorporating spiritual perspectives within environmental literature, especially in children's fiction. Although ecocriticism has developed robustly in recent decades, most studies have emphasized realism, environmental degradation, or anthropocentric critique. Few have examined how nature is framed as a divine or sacred presence, particularly in literature for younger readers. Babbitt's novel offers a compelling case for this focus, portraying the sea as an entity

capable of emotional, moral, and spiritual influence.

The urgency of this study lies in its contribution to bridging ecocriticism and spiritual ecology. Scholars such as C. (1996), Buell (2011), and Tucker (2014) emphasize the need for new environmental narratives that reimagine the human-nature relationship beyond resource-based thinking. As climate crises intensify and eco-anxiety rises, especially among younger generations, literature that frames nature as sacred can foster early ecological empathy. *The Eyes of the Amaryllis* not only offers a critique of anthropocentrism but also models a worldview rooted in reverence, reciprocity, and emotional connection with the natural world.

This research draws from literary ecocriticism and spiritual ecology to analyze how Babbitt constructs the sea as a divine spirit within the narrative. While earlier studies, S, Triyadi E Nurhasanah & A (2021) have discussed environmental symbolism in fiction, few have investigated the sacred dimensions of nature in children's literature. This study seeks to address that gap by exploring three interconnected questions; first, how the sea is represented as a divine or spiritual force in *The Eyes of the Amaryllis*; second, what ecological and ethical values emerge from the sea's interactions with the characters; and finally, how this portrayal fosters environmental consciousness in young readers.

By conducting a close reading of the novel's character development, narrative structure, and symbolic language, this research proposes that Babbitt's work advances a powerful eco-spiritual ethic. The sea is not

merely a backdrop but a moral and metaphysical presence that challenges readers to rethink their relationship with the more-than-human world.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative literary analysis approach grounded in ecocriticism and spiritual ecology. Qualitative research, by nature, emphasizes contextual understanding and the interpretation of meaning, especially in texts that explore human relationships with nature. Unlike quantitative methods that prioritize measurement and generalization, qualitative literary analysis seeks to explore how meaning is constructed through language, symbols, and narrative form.

The primary method used is close reading, focusing on Natalie Babbitt's novel *The Eyes of the Amaryllis*. This process involves a detailed textual examination of selected passages that prominently feature the sea and its interactions with the characters. Three key literary elements were the focus of analysis; (1) narrative structure surrounding the sea and its consequences; (2) symbolic language describing the sea's divine or moral attributes; and (3) character development in relation to ecological or spiritual transformation.

Textual excerpts were selected purposively based on their relevance to the study's research questions, specifically, passages that reflect the sea's spiritual agency, emotional impact, and ecological symbolism. These were analyzed thematically using the theoretical framework of ecocriticism (Glottfelty, 1996;

Buell, 2011) and spiritual ecology (Tucker, 2014), allowing the researchers to interpret the metaphysical dimensions of nature portrayed in the text.

To enhance validity, this research triangulates interpretations with secondary sources including scholarly literature on ecocriticism, environmental humanities, and relevant prior analyses of children's literature. Researchers also engaged in peer debriefing to test interpretations and reduce individual bias. While qualitative literary analysis is inherently interpretive, this research ensures reliability through transparent coding of key themes and citation of textual evidence in each claim, allowing other scholars to trace the analytical process. This methodological design makes the study both replicable and flexible, enabling future researchers to apply similar procedures to other works of children's literature that engage with ecological and spiritual themes.

3. RESULT

3.1 The Sea as a Powerful Symbol: Nature's Force and Climate Change

This section explores how the sea in *The Eyes of the Amaryllis* functions as a divine symbol and ecological force, responding to the first and second research questions of how is the sea represented as a divine or spiritual force and what ecological and ethical values are conveyed through its interaction with human characters?

In *The Eyes of the Amaryllis*, the ocean is not a passive backdrop but an active, almost

sentient force that drives the plot and symbolizes nature's power. The story opens with the sinking of the ship *Amaryllis*—a brig “swallowed in a hurricane,” taking the captain (Geneva's husband) and crew down with it. This dramatic event immediately establishes the sea as a potent and unpredictable presence. The hurricane serves as a representation of nature's might and volatility, echoing the extreme weather events we witness today amid the climate crisis. The same kind of catastrophic hurricane that destroyed the *Amaryllis* is increasingly likely in our reality due to climate change.

Geneva's response to the shipwreck is to remain by the sea for thirty years, patiently awaiting a sign from her lost husband. Her vigil demonstrates a deep reverence for the sea's power, in which she believes it has the agency to communicate with her in its own time. This belief aligns with spiritual ecology, which recognizes nature's capacity to “speak” to those who are willing to listen (Tucker, 2014). Modern coastal communities, too, are at the mercy of the oceans; rising sea levels and stronger storms displace families and force them to interpret nature's “messages” in the form of flooding and erosion. Climate science confirms that sea-level rise accelerates as ice sheets melt and warmer oceans expand. In the novel, the sea is described as “a game that only the sea knows how to win”—a poignant metaphor illustrating nature's ultimate superiority over human efforts. As Buell (2011) noted, before readers can respond to environmental problems, they must first change how they imagine their relationship with nature. Babbitt's novel invites readers to see the ocean

not as a benign backdrop or playground, but as a vast and morally charged entity that demands respect. The hurricane becomes a symbolic reminder of the fragility of human life in the face of natural forces, which is an increasingly relevant lesson as climate disasters grow more frequent and severe.

The portrayal of the sea as a divine spirit becomes clearer when Jenny challenges anthropomorphic views. She expresses satisfaction when Grandmother Geneva refers to the sea as “it” instead of “she” or “he.” This subtle shift emphasizes the sea’s transcendence. Like the divine, it exists beyond human categories. In English, God is often referred to as “He,” but Babbitt resists such binary framing. Instead of objectifying the sea or associating it with gendered roles (passive female, active male), the novel elevates it beyond human labels, reinforcing its spiritual autonomy. For the purposes of this analysis, the term “divine spirit” refers not to a specific deity but to a sacred, moral force that is capable of compassion, judgment, and transformation.

The sea is also depicted as superior in the power hierarchy. In the novel’s prologue, the sea—along with the lost Amaryllis—is shown to instantly alter human lives, taking “whatever it desires.” This idea is supported by one of the novel’s most lyrical and philosophical reflections:

For life came first from the sea and can be taken back. Listen. Your bodies are three-fourths water, like the surface of the Earth. Ashes to ashes, the Bible says, and maybe so—but the ashes float on the water of you, like that purple feathered fleeting on the tide. Even your tears are salty (Babbitt, 1977).

Here, Babbitt presents the sea not only as the source of life but as a force that retains ultimate claim over it. This passage blends scientific fact (the human body’s water content) with spiritual metaphor, positioning the sea as both creator and reclamer. It subtly reframes human vulnerability as a spiritual and ecological truth: human is made of water, and to water, she/he may return.

As a divine spirit, the sea possesses dual attributes, namely compassion and wrath. Its compassion is evident in Jenny’s first encounter with the shore:

“Another wave, a soft thump, the slide of foam, repeated over and over again. She watched it, amazed and faintly hypnotized, and the feeling of freedom that had come to her at first grew deeper.” (Babbitt, 1977)

For Jenny, the sea is calming and liberating. Geneva also experiences this benevolence. She believes the Amaryllis was not destroyed but “sailing under the sea,” protecting sacred treasures. While this belief may stem from grief, it reflects her reverent worldview. According to Geneva, the sea does not take blindly; it safeguards and transforms. In contrast, George, who is filled with fear and trauma, perceives the sea only as a threat, and thus, cannot access its compassion. This character contrast offers an answer to the second research question, ethical and emotional relationships with nature are shaped by how humans choose to engage with it. However, the sea also displays divine anger when disrespected. After Jenny hides the ship’s figurehead, the weather shifts. Seward, the guardian of the sea, warns that if the object is not returned, the sea will reclaim it by force.

Geneva's refusal to heed the warning intensifies the sea's wrath:

The sea had risen just over the top of the bluff, and now, instead of rushing sideways to the arm of land beside them, it raged like boiling water in a great pot, tumbling, churning, rushing in every direction at once, smashing against itself and casting up bursts of glittering spray. (Babbitt, 1977)

This violent imagery depicts nature's retaliation as morally driven. Despite Geneva's long loyalty, the sea enforces its own code of respect. She ultimately concedes, returning the figurehead, and peace is restored.

Notably, the sea's final gesture is one of forgiveness. As Geneva and Jenny prepare to leave the beach, they discover a stalk of amaryllis flowers blooming in the sand: "There it was, growing in the middle of the sand—a stalk of deep red blossoms." (Babbitt, 1977). The flower functions as a symbolic offering—a divine sign of closure and grace. The sea punishes, but it also heals.

Based on the analysis above, this section illustrates how the sea embodies a post humanist, eco spiritual force—at once powerful, sacred, and responsive. It affirms the study's argument that Babbitt presents the sea as a moral agent, one that interacts with humans according to their intentions, perceptions, and ethical choices. These findings clearly address the research questions by showing that the novel challenges anthropocentric views and promotes a reimagined human-nature relationship rooted in humility, reciprocity, and reverence.

3.2 The Meaning of the Sea: Human Ignorance and Ecological Awareness

Among the many themes in *The Eyes of the Amaryllis*, one of the most thought-provoking is the novel's subtle invitation for readers to rethink their relationship with nature. Through symbolic imagery and direct critique, Babbitt encourages a shift away from superficial, human-centered views of the sea and toward a deeper, more respectful ecological awareness. This concern reflects the novel's response to an important aspect of the current study, how literature can shape readers' perspectives on nature, particularly through the lens of ecocriticism.

One of the clearest critiques appears in the novel's prologue, where a ghostly voice (later associated with the character Seward) addresses the casual beachgoers of Cape Cod. He warns:

"Listen, all you people lying lazy on the beach, is this what you imagine is the meaning of the sea? Oh, yes, it winks and sparkles as it sways beside you, spreading lacy foam along the sand, as dainty as a handkerchief." (Babbitt, 1977)

This rhetorical question confronts readers with the tendency to treat nature as purely decorative or entertaining. The sea is portrayed here as "sparkling" and "dainty," yet the voice challenges this limited view. The passage critiques the shallow enjoyment of natural spaces and implies that such detachment prevents genuine understanding. It mirrors modern attitudes, particularly in tourism, where nature is

consumed for pleasure but rarely respected for its ecological or spiritual significance.

From an ecocritical perspective, this scene captures what Buell (2011) describes as “environmental imagination,” the process by which literature expands the reader’s perception of nature beyond aesthetic appreciation. Seward’s voice functions as a literary device that compels both characters and readers to acknowledge what lies beneath the surface. The novel suggests that true ecological awareness requires a shift in perspective, from passive admiration to ethical recognition.

This message also aligns with real-world environmental discourse. The ocean, while visually captivating, plays a critical role in sustaining life on Earth. It regulates climate, absorbs carbon, and supports marine biodiversity. Yet human activities—such as pollution, overfishing, and greenhouse gas emissions—have endangered these systems. Babbitt’s critique of shallow environmental views parallels this reality, reminding readers that ignoring the ocean’s complexity can have profound consequences.

In giving the sea a voice through Seward, Babbitt imbues nature with moral and spiritual presence. The ocean is no longer just a setting; it becomes a speaker with its own message. This aligns with Garrard’s (2004) concept of “ecocentric ethics,” where nature is recognized as a subject with intrinsic value and agency. From a spiritual ecology perspective, the sea’s symbolic voice challenges human dominance and suggests that nature has its own wisdom and authority.

Seward’s sermon also foreshadows the novel’s broader message. Understanding the sea’s “true meaning” requires more than observing its beauty. It demands listening to its warnings, interpreting its signs, and accepting its power. This transformation is mirrored in the narrative arc, where characters like Geneva and Jenny shift from viewing the sea as a backdrop to understanding it as a sacred force. Readers are likewise encouraged to examine their own assumptions about nature and move toward a more reciprocal relationship.

By combining vivid metaphor, character development, and symbolic narration, *The Eyes of the Amaryllis* serves as both a story and a vehicle for ecological reflection. Its critique of ignorance and its portrayal of the sea as an expressive, ethical entity support the argument that children’s literature can play a role in shaping environmental consciousness. As Jenny’s understanding of the sea deepens, readers are invited to reflect on their own. The novel illustrates how literature can not only depict environmental attitudes but also inspire transformation by challenging readers to see nature with greater empathy and respect.

3.3 Spirituality of Nature: From Ghostly Presence to Ecological Spirituality

One of the most distinctive aspects of *The Eyes of the Amaryllis* is its blending of the supernatural with the natural—particularly in how the sea is portrayed as having a spiritual or mystical dimension. This section explores how such a portrayal responds to question of how the sea is represented as a divine or spiritual force within the novel.

Geneva's unwavering belief that her deceased husband will send her a sign from the sea reflects a deep spiritual connection to nature. For her, the ocean is not simply a physical landscape but a liminal space—a conduit between life and death and a source of meaning beyond the visible world. Her vigil at the shoreline suggests that the sea holds memory, presence, and perhaps even intention.

This is further reinforced by the character Seward, who watches and interacts with Geneva and Jenny. Described as a “spectral presence,” Seward is introduced in the prologue where he delivers a kind of sermon on the ocean's deeper meaning. He functions almost as the sea's mouthpiece, or an embodiment of its voice. This literary element—the personification of nature as a conscious, speaking entity—resonates with the concept of spiritual ecology, which regards nature not only as biologically alive but also as sacred and morally significant. As Mary Evelyn Tucker (2014) suggests, spiritual ecology challenges the modern disconnection between the spiritual and the environmental by recognizing “the sacred nature of creation” and calling for the reintegration of the human soul with the Earth.

In the novel, the sea's spiritual pull is evident that it “calls” to Geneva, holding her emotionally and physically at the edge of the shore for decades. The long-awaited “message” from her husband—when it finally arrives—is both a physical object and a spiritual sign. It symbolizes not only memory and loss but a love that transcends death. In this way, the sea

becomes a medium of emotional continuity, moral revelation, and metaphysical connection.

This fictional portrayal anticipates a modern interpretation of ecological crisis as not merely scientific or political, but deeply spiritual. Scholars and environmental thinkers have increasingly argued that the climate crisis is also a crisis of meaning—a symptom of humanity's alienation from nature. The novel reflects this by suggesting that the environmental “signs” we receive today—such as wildfires, floods, or plastic debris washing ashore—can be understood not just as data points, but as messages. Like Geneva, we can choose whether to ignore these messages or interpret them as calls for transformation.

This idea aligns with what environmentalists describe as an “ecological conversion”—a shift in consciousness that is emotional, ethical, and spiritual in nature. Rather than seeing nature as an “it,” to use Martin Buber's terms, this conversion invites us to relate to nature as a “Thou,” a being worthy of empathy and respect. The novel models this transformation through Geneva's reverence, Jenny's openness, and the sea's role as an agent of moral and emotional meaning.

Importantly, Babbitt does not suggest that readers must literally believe in ghosts or sea spirits. Rather, she uses these literary devices to awaken a sense of empathy and kinship with the more-than-human world. The novel proposes that healing human relationship with nature may require reimagining it as sacred—not in a dogmatic sense, but in an emotional and ethical one. As studies in environmental psychology

suggest, individuals who feel a spiritual or emotional connection to the natural world are more likely to engage in pro-environmental behaviors.

In other words, the problem lies not only in what people do to nature, but also in how they see it. When people place humans at the center and treat nature as soulless or inert, they create the moral distance that enables exploitation. Ecocriticism, particularly in its spiritual forms, calls readers to re-center nature within their values. *The Eyes of the Amaryllis* answers this call by portraying the sea as a spiritual teacher—one that speaks, remembers, forgives, and transforms.

3.4 Human Perspectives Across Generations: Fear, Reverence, and Changing Attitudes

The interpersonal dynamics in *The Eyes of the Amaryllis* offer a layered metaphor for shifting human perspectives on nature. Through the portrayal of three generations, Geneva, her son George, and her granddaughter Jenny, Babbitt illustrates a continuum of attitudes toward the sea, ranging from reverence to fear to reconciliation. These contrasting perspectives provide insight into how ecological awareness is shaped by experience, trauma, and generational inheritance, directly addressing the third research question regarding literature's potential to influence readers' views of nature.

Geneva, the grandmother, embodies reverence and devotion to the ocean, almost to the point of spiritual obsession. Though the sea claimed her husband, she chooses to remain close to it, finding not only sorrow but also

meaning and hope. Her decades-long vigil at the shore reflects a belief that nature holds memory and agency. Geneva's relationship with the sea is deeply spiritual; she sees it not only as a destructive force but as a companion that sustains her emotional connection to love, grief, and the afterlife.

George, her son and Jenny's father, presents a stark contrast. Traumatized by the loss of his father to the sea during his childhood, he develops what the novel calls a "paralyzing dread of the ocean." He avoids the sea entirely and is reluctant to let Jenny visit Geneva by the shore. His response represents a modern impulse to distance oneself from nature's unpredictability—reflecting a tendency to either ignore or attempt to control nature rather than engage with it meaningfully. George's fear is also indicative of how personal or collective trauma, such as surviving a natural disaster, can foster long-term psychological distancing from the environment.

Jenny, the granddaughter, offers a middle path. Initially unfamiliar with the sea's meaning, she arrives at the shore with curiosity but no emotional context. Over time, however, she begins to understand both her grandmother's devotion and her father's fear. Jenny acts as a bridge between the two worldviews. She helps Geneva, respects the sea's power, and is unafraid to face it. Her development mirrors that of today's younger generation, who inherit the climate crisis from those before them. Like Jenny, many youths are tasked with interpreting the environmental legacy they've been given—seeking a balance between reverence for nature and the responsibility to act.

This generational dynamic mirrors broader shifts in cultural attitudes toward the environment. Earlier generations, such as Geneva's, often maintained a spiritual or subsistence-based relationship with nature—intimate, reverent, and based on direct experience. George, shaped by trauma and modern detachment, embodies a more fragmented view. Jenny, by contrast, suggests the possibility of ecological renewal through empathy, understanding, and active engagement.

As Garrard notes, ecocriticism often examines how literature reflects and shapes evolving cultural narratives about nature. In this case, Babbitt shows that the relationship between humans and the environment is never static; it is dynamic, generational, and emotionally charged. The novel's resolution, which involves healing between Geneva, George, and Jenny, symbolically suggests that a harmonious relationship with nature is still possible. However, such harmony depends on integrating both reverence for the natural world and the courage to act within it (G, 2004).

Ultimately, *The Eyes of the Amaryllis* suggests that environmental understanding does not emerge from one perspective only. It evolves through generational dialogue—between memory and action, grief and responsibility. In highlighting these intergenerational tensions and transformations, the novel encourages readers to reflect on how their own views of nature may be shaped by both history and choice.

4. CONCLUSION

The analysis of *The Eyes of the Amaryllis* reveals that Natalie Babbitt constructs the sea not merely as a setting, but as a symbol of divine power, moral agency, and ecological spirituality. Through this portrayal, the novel affirms nature's autonomy and challenges anthropocentric views that frame the environment as passive or subordinate. Each thematic element—from the metaphorical hurricane and the sea's spiritual traits to the intergenerational shifts in perception—highlights the dynamic and ethically charged relationship between humans and the natural world.

This research finds that the sea functions as a divine spirit, capable of offering both compassion and judgment. Such representation reflects the principles of spiritual ecology and promotes a view of nature that is sacred and relational. The novel also critiques shallow, aestheticized understandings of the sea, urging readers to develop deeper ecological awareness. Moreover, by presenting differing generational responses to the sea, the narrative shows how environmental attitudes are shaped by personal experience and cultural memory, while also pointing to the potential for reconciliation and transformation through younger generations.

Overall, the findings support the argument that *The Eyes of the Amaryllis* serves as more than a story of grief and resolution. It becomes a literary model of ecological ethics, encouraging readers—especially children and adolescents—to foster a more empathetic, respectful, and spiritually grounded relationship with nature.

Future research may benefit from examining similar eco spiritual themes in other works of children's literature, particularly those that focus on marine or coastal settings. Comparative studies across cultural contexts could also enrich readers' understanding of how sacred relationships with nature are framed in both Western and non-Western ecological narratives. Additionally, interdisciplinary approaches that combine ecocriticism with environmental psychology could further explore how spiritual depictions of nature influence ecological attitudes and behaviors in young readers.

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