Can Poetry Save the World?

Creating a Sustainable Future by Reading Green
ABSTRACT

Alexander Vainikainen

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The purpose of this essay is to examine how ecocritical readings of poems and song lyrics can work as a catalyst for discussing questions regarding sustainable development in the subject of English. The poems “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” by William Wordsworth and “Andrew” by Andrea Gibson, but also the song lyrics for the song “Every Age” by José Gonzalez were selected for the analyze, since they can represent the varying types of texts that are used by teachers in upper secondary school.

The essay leans heavily on different terms associated with ecocriticism and other closely related fields such as ecofeminism and environmental pedagogy since it can help to create an understanding for the complexity of sustainability and how it can be taught in the classroom.

The analyses showed that it is possible to address sustainable development through ecocritical readings of poems and song lyrics. There are two obvious ways forward that could be taken where the first would be to analyze even more texts in order to see if the methods used in the analyses are applicable to any other number of texts that are available to use in the classroom. The other way would be to apply the methods in a classroom situation and see if the methods would be suited for upper secondary school students.

Keywords: ecocriticism, ecofeminism, environmental pedagogy, sustainable development, teaching, reading green, poetry
1 Introduction

As society has progressed, it has become increasingly evident that a more conscious approach towards the environment, and the society we reside in, is needed. In the curriculum for the upper secondary school in Sweden, which was published by Skolverket in 2013, it is written that schools are tasked with teaching ethical awareness to students (6). Environmental perspectives are also an overarching theme within the curriculum, and the curriculum states that students should gain insights in order to develop a personal approach towards overarching environmental issues and be able to contribute in a way which prevents harmful environmental effects (6).

As a student on the teacher education program I have performed several field studies and had the chance to discuss various topics with practicing teachers. One thing that I have noticed when talking to teachers is that they tend to ignore teaching their students about sustainable development in their English courses. Many have expressed that there is not an adequate amount of teaching materials available that can guide them through the process, which in turn complicates the implementation of environmental education in the subject. Another aspect is that some of these teachers tend to think of sustainable development as something which is mainly taught in other courses such as social studies and sciences.

The concept of sustainability has seen many different interpretations, and Greg Garrard claims that these interpretations have ranged from everything between radical ecological transformations to “business as usual” (374). One version that has been more influential than others, however, is the one formulated by the Brundtland Commission. The UN General Assembly established the Brundtland Commission in the 1980’s when they realized that there was a deterioration of the environment and natural resources. The Brundtland Commission had the intention to bridge the gap that used to exist between environmental policies and those concerned with social development. In the book *The Environment in Question: Ethics and Global Issues*, Joy A. Palmer refers to World Commission on Environment and Development’s definition, which states that “sustainable development is a dynamic process designed to meet today’s needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (180). In other words, sustainable development is a way to ensure that the world is granted a positive and progressive development which does not affect the future negatively.

Ecocriticism is a field which analyzes the cultural origins and responses to environmental crisis (Garrard 360). My opinion is that ecocritical readings of various texts could be used as a means to open up for further discussions regarding sustainable development
in the subject of English. Cheryll Glotfelty’s definition of ecocriticism as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment remains one of the more commonly used descriptions of the field, but the field itself has traversed well beyond her initial explanation (xiii). There is, however, something interesting to be found in Glotfelty’s acknowledgement of how all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world by both affecting it and being affected by it (xix). Ecocriticism brings forth these different connections in order to raise awareness regarding human and non-human environments, which I suggest in turn makes it highly applicable to use as a theoretical approach in a classroom. It is through a consideration of the different terms associated with ecocriticism and other closely related fields such as ecofeminism and environmental pedagogy that we can understand the complexity of sustainability and how that can be used in the classroom.

In his study, titled *The West Side of Any Mountain: Place, Space, and Ecopoetry*, J. Scott Bryson writes that while ecopoetry may be closely related to traditional nature poetry, it reaches beyond that tradition and deals with contemporary problems and issues (2). As such, he claims that it can be marked by three primary characteristics: an ecological and biological perspective that recognizes how the nature of the world is interdependent; a caring attitude for the relationship with human and non-human nature; and a skepticism which usually tends to condemn an overtechnologized modern world and warn about the possibility of ecological catastrophe (2). Bryson’s definition will serve as a compass for me in my selection of appropriate poems and song lyrics to use for my ecocritical reading and analysis.

**1.1 The purpose of this essay**

The purpose of this essay is to examine how ecocritical readings of poems and song lyrics can work as a catalyst for discussing questions regarding sustainable development in the subject of English. In order to accomplish this, I have chosen the poems “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” by William Wordsworth and “Andrew” by Andrea Gibson, but also the song lyrics for the song “Every Age” by José Gonzalez. Song lyrics are often used to ease students into more difficult texts, and most teachers use traditional as well as contemporary poems when they are teaching poetry. My thought is that my selections can represent the varying types of texts commonly used by teachers while teaching poetry in upper secondary school. To approach the topics which are at the heart of this essay, the following research questions will be used:
• How can different aspects of sustainable development be explored through ecocritical readings of poems and song lyrics?
• How could these poems be incorporated in a didactic situation in an upper secondary school English class?

2 Background

This section will provide definitions and elaborate on concepts which are at the heart of this essay. My assumption is that the concepts and approaches which are presented below are all integral to understanding the complexity of using literature as a means to involve students in discussions regarding sustainable development.

2.1 Sustainable development

The concept of sustainable development is complex according to Helen Hasslöf, Margareta Ekborg and Claes Malmberg since it deals with all the integrated aspects of environmental, sociocultural and economic sustainability (41). The concept of sustainability contains a diverse range of embedded values and ideologies while calling for engagement in value-related and political issues which are related to environment, equality and lifestyle. Hasslöf, et al. write that the world and its modern cities include a multitude of societies, cultures, and lifestyles, which are defined by their different ways to look at life. In other words, the modern views of development and views of nature are formed by several different political, cultural, ideological and religious beliefs (42). Therefore, articulating the connection between development and sustainability, but also defining the concepts by themselves, can be done in many different ways. As a consequence, it is difficult for corporations, politicians and researchers to reach an agreement on actions that are beneficial for a sustainable future.

In their work Sustainable Development and Learning: Framing the Issues, William Scott and Stephen Gough argue that it is utopic to make proclamations about the correct or best decisions of sustainability since there is such complexity and uncertainty associated with future questions of sustainability (49). They argue that, instead of being seen as a predefined outcome to achieve, sustainability should be a way to live and learn from different views, experiences and practices. The conflicting perspectives of different human interests, according to Søren Breiting and Finn Mogensen, could be an important part of understanding the conceptions related to environmental issues (349).
2.1.1 Steering documents for the upper secondary school in Sweden

While the course plans for the English subject mentions that students should have the opportunity to learn about social issues, living conditions, and cultural features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is spoken, other aspects of sustainable development are absent (Skolverket 1). In other words, there seems to be a connection to what the teachers that I have discussed this topic with tend to think, namely that it is meant for other subjects such as science and social studies. It might have to do with the fact that in those subjects it is an integral part of the content in the course plans. English, on the other hand, is meant to teach students about language and culture. A lot of emphasis is put on helping students develop their language skills and interpreting different kinds of text. All in all, there is room to incorporate sustainable development in the subject of English, although the course plan does not explicitly mention its implementation.

2.2 Ecocriticism

Although the term ecocriticism was coined in the late 1970s by William Rueckert (Lawrence Buell 13), the term was not used to describe the literary field which studies human-nature relations in literature, film and other cultural expressions until the early 1990s (Astrid Bracke & Marguérite Corporaal 709) when ASLE (the Association for Study of Literature and the Environment) was created (Susan M. Bernardo 1). Ecocritics were initially targeting American nature writing, the British Romantics and environmentally oriented non-fiction according to Bracke and Corporaal but have in recent years also started to include earlier literary works and texts produced outside of the Anglo-American world (709). Furthermore, Bracke and Corporaal mention how ecocritics are continuing to reinvent themselves by taking interdisciplinary approaches which are informed by, for example, risk theory, queer studies and postcolonialism. Due to these approaches, ecocriticism has found itself in the forefront of current trends in the study of literatures in English.

In his study *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, Buell remarks how it is impossible to completely define environmental criticism in literary studies (17). He does, however, make a case that it is possible to witness some sort of evolution from a “first-wave” of ecocriticism to a “second” or newer revisionist or waves increasingly evident today. Nevertheless, he argues that this first to second distinction should not be viewed as a clear succession since many aspects of second wave revisionism are built upon things that were set in motion by the first wave. For first-wave ecocritics, the “environment” was the “natural environment” and it was pivotal to
preserve nature by actively engaging in environmentalist causes (21). Second-wave ecocritics, on the other hand, questioned earlier perceptions because they claimed that natural and built environments have been mixed up for a long time (22). According to them, literature-and-environmental studies must develop a “social ecocriticism” which views urban and degraded landscapes just as seriously as “natural” landscapes.

2.2.1 Place, space and environment

In the foreword to *Environments in Science Fiction* Bernardo describes space, place and environment as three different, but closely related, concepts for ecocritics (2-3). According to her, environment is a term to use while referring to the complex surroundings we experience, which include both built and unbuilt nature. It does not, however, involve the same attachment as place does. Since we tend to discuss and focus on the environment’s specific attributes, such as its architectural design, it is not as broad a concept as space is either. Furthermore, Bernardo writes that we generally have a tendency to view the environment through the physical surroundings we inhabit rather than any specific emotional link we might have to that setting. To separate the concepts of place and space from one another, Buell describes place, in contrast to the abstract space, as space to which meaning has been ascribed and as centers of felt value (63). In other words, he means that place is somewhere to which we are bound through our social relations and to which we can identify.

2.3 Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism is a field with ties to ecocriticism although it focuses more on the connection between how women, animals and nature have been oppressed and the structures of oppressive systems in themselves. A brief exposition of ecofeminism is provided by Greta Gaard in her article “Children’s environmental literature: from ecocriticism to ecopedagogy” (323). In the article she writes that ecofeminism is a perspective which views social and environmental problems as fundamentally interconnected. It recognizes that the position and treatment of women, animals and nature are not separable. In other words, ecofeminists do not only make connections among sexism, speciesism, and the oppression of nature, but also other forms of social injustice such as racism, classism, heterosexism, ageism, ableism, and colonialism as part of western culture’s assault on nature. According to Gaard, ecofeminism studies the structure of oppressive systems. In order to do so, it identifies three steps in the “logic of domination” (323). The first step is alienation, which stems from the belief that there is a separate self-
identity, individualism and autonomy. In the second step, hierarchy, the self-based is elevated on its unique characteristics. The final step is domination, where the subordination of others is justified because of their inferiority and lack of the Self’s unique characteristics.

In another article named “Toward a Queer Ecofeminism”, Gaard identifies the connection between nationalism, colonialism and the construction of the dominant human male (130-131). Without going into further detail on the contents of her article, she argues that there is a homogeneity in perceptions which promote a heterosexuality conformed within certain parameters. She also points out how appeals to nature have often been a common way to justify social norms, which in turn has been detrimental to women, nature, queers and persons of color (129). The range of colonial assaults on sexuality – from gender to same sex behaviors to heterosexual practices – is described by her as erotophobic rather than homophobic. According to Gaard the native feminized other of nature is not just eroticized, but also queered and animalized (131). As a consequence, any sexual behavior which exists outside the boundaries of heterosexuality becomes queer and subhuman.

### 2.4 Environmental pedagogy

This section of the paper will explore environmental pedagogy, which is an approach to education. Environmental education (EE), education for sustainable development (ESD) and ecopedagogy are all different forms of environmental pedagogy which will be elaborated on further in order to provide a basis for the discussion. My stance is that there are aspects from all these different pedagogies which are worth taking into account while teaching about the environment and sustainable development. In other words, I believe that it is paramount that one, as a teacher, does not conform to just one discipline or approach, but try to involve many different perspectives in order to create a fundament which can be used effectively when teaching literature, for instance.

#### 2.4.1 Environmental education

Environmental education (EE) was formed during the middle of the previous century according to Evgenia Flogaitis, Maria Daskolia, and Evagelia Agelidou (126). Since it was established, it has grown as a theoretical stream and as an educational practice. Environmental education expresses the need to confront three interconnected crises: the environmental crisis, the crisis in the relationship between humans and the environment, and the crisis in education which concerns traditional school practices. Therefore, it can be said that it was established as a type
of education which is meant to shape responsible and active citizens who are equipped with the knowledge and will to produce environmental and educational transformation.

There are two levels to the main goals of environmental education according to Flogaitis et al. (126). The first level is all about the development of knowledge concerning the environment and environmental problems as well as the necessary skills which are needed to understand and effectively deal with such issues. The second level is more about the development of favorable attitudes and behavior, but also the commitment towards taking action with the aim of resolving environmental problems. Flogaitis et al. argue that environmental education in that aspect separates itself from earlier educational movements that primarily focused on nature and expressed romantic demands for a return to it (126).

According to Flogaitis et al. it was determined during international conferences in the 1970’s that one object of environmental education should be the environment, which should be seen as a bio-physical and social reality (126). The other object should be environmental problems, which are caused by incorrect human practices. There is, however, not a commonly accepted environmental education, although there is a consensus about its conceptual and methodological framework. Instead Flogaitis et al. argue that there are several different opinions and trends, and that they in turn generate different kinds of environmental education. Since there are many different conceptions of what “environment” and “education” are, it is completely logical that different kinds of environmental education exist. In fact, there are also several different views of the relationship between the environment and education, and how it is projected in educational practice as well. As far as the relationship between “environment” and “education” is concerned according to Flogaitis et al., environmental education can be regarded as being an education about the environment, an education in or through the environment or an education for the environment where environment is (126). In other words, it can be the content which is used, but also the field, the source or the means. Beyond that they even suggest that it could be the main goal of education.

Flogaitis et al. argue that if the aforementioned aspects are considered, the goals of environmental education, environmental education’s concept of the citizen it wants to form, the solution to environmental problems, and how schools should orient themselves towards pedagogical practices and functions are interpreted differently depending on the context (126). They do write, however, that these many different views should not be thought of as a disadvantage (126). They mean that they are actually quite in line with the conceptual and methodological wealth of environmental education, and as such they bring out the freedom and democracy of its thought and expression.
2.4.2 Education for sustainable development

Education for sustainable development retains two advantages over environmental education according to Garrard (375). He writes that it is oriented towards provisionality, dynamic responsiveness, and the future, and that it emphasizes the interrelatedness of environmental problems with economic and social issues such as global inequity, warfare, and consumerist forms of desire (375). He also mentions that in order to motivate students to take action towards environmental problems, teachers should not riddle them with fear or guilt as a means to spark that motivation. Instead he suggests that students can learn more actively about the limits of individual action.

Education for sustainable development (ESD) as well as the concept of sustainability have been the target of extensive interpretation and discussion according to Hasslöf, Ekborg and Malmberg (41). Furthermore, Hasslöf et al. argues that education for sustainable development can be perceived as a coin with two sides (42). One side represents the desire to encourage sustainable thinking by advocating for friendly relations between the different interests which reflect the environmental, economic and socio-cultural dimensions of sustainable development and in this way each a consensus. The opposite side, on the other hand, seeks to scrutinize these conflicting interests to find the right way to deal with the issues.

Sustainability can be seen as a highly complex or ‘wicked’ problem. Harold Glasser writes that wicked problems are characterized by knowledge that could be either incomplete or contradictory, false perceptions, and have a scope or scale that is difficult to determine (36). There are also multiple explanations to wicked problems and the solution to them. The solutions, in turn, are temporary because of the interconnected nature of the problems and may potentially cause more and worse problems. Wicked problems also contain economic, environmental, and social burdens, which are uncertain, potentially significant, and could be passed on to future generations, those who are most at risk, and non-humans. Only one of these elements is needed to make a problem wicked according to Glasser (36). Because every wicked problem is unique, evolving and hard to control, Glasser explains that the chances of learning directly by trial and error is minimal. It can also be difficult to generalize “solution” strategies from past practice.

According to Glasser sustainable well-being is an easy concept to grasp on an ultimate goal level (54). It is also easy to form a wide consensus around. However, like peace, human rights, progress, and democracy, it can seem easy enough to grasp before looking at the details. As Glasser writes about the how ill-defined well-being is:
“There are, as of yet, no clear, well-accepted definitions of “well-being” or common descriptions of what constitute minimal, viable per capita draws on human and natural capital in different regions of the planet” (Glasser, 54)

As such there is no clear end point to the wicked problem of sustainable well-being since there will always be improvements to the well-being of some people and strides towards making the world more equitable.

Iann Lundegård and Per-Olof Wickman highlight how important it is for teachers to create opportunities for students to get involved in discussions as a way to experience some of the different interpretations and complexity inherent in issues of sustainable development (3). Hasslöf et al. agree that bringing forth conflicting perspectives can be one way to help students become more aware of the many and complex interpretations of sustainability (43). They do, however, mention that it is just as essential to recognize the political aspect of sustainability, which is the tension between discourses and personal views. According to Hasslöf et al., there is a tension between advocating for a general agreement on how to view sustainability as a part of social decision-making and the will to explore the many different views of sustainability. One way to deal with this tension, according to Lundegård and Wickman is through the use of methods such as participatory approaches and deliberative discussion (3). Jeppe Læssøe argues that, even in genuine participatory processes, deep ideological conflicts are avoided (40). In other words, it is difficult for teachers to create a situation where these discussions can be discussed on a much deeper level. According to Læssøe that it is a flaw that needs to be dealt with and that teachers need to organize participatory processes that traverse beyond the focus on conflict-free and consensual actions. Instead, an emphasis should be put on deliberating and making room for debate and the processing of dilemmas (40).

2.4.3 Ecocritical pedagogy

Ecopedagogy is, according to Greg William Misiaszek, a critical approach to the teaching and learning of connections between environmental and social problems (280). Despite how difficult it might be to separate these aspects, many times the connections between them are bypassed or mistaught. Misiaszek mentions how some scholars claim that the reason behind this dilemma is the power relations that exist inside and outside of educational systems (280). Hence, a critical approach is important since it can expose valuable aspects that under other circumstances would be difficult to observe.
Heather Bruce writes about “reading green” which is a type of ecopedagogy (16). According to her our values are revealed through the imaginative and rhetorical selections we choose to read as well as how we choose to approach them in a classroom environment. In other words, both the selection of literature and the approach towards it becomes integral parts of reading green. One approach, that Bruce describes as the primary way of reading green, is to examine what is commonly called “nature” writing or environmental literature (16). There are other approaches as well, and even though they may seem less obvious Bruce writes that they are easy to use for any selection that can be taught in the classroom (16). These methods of reading green usually involve ideas for approaching literature in order to explore literary expression and its relationship with the world in other ways than just from a human centered perspective. Instead, an ecocentric perspective is the focus, where the world is explored not only through the surroundings where humans carry on with their daily lives, but non-human species as well.

Environmental education, education for sustainable development and ecopedagogy can all be approached critically or non-critically according to Misiaszek (280). Ecopedagogy, however, emphasizes the critical approach. Misiaszek writes how scholars who follow the critical approach suggest that a tension exists between the various environmental pedagogies, but that similar things could be said about all education (280). According to the scholars Misiaszek mentions the tension namely exists between pedagogies that aim to transform societies and pedagogies that in many cases unintentionally become responsible for recreating the structures of historical socioenvironmental oppressions. Misiaszek states that ecopedagogy points out the aforementioned transformative aspects while looking at how all individuals, societies and the natural world can be included (280). Researchers who seek an ecopedagogical approach want to show how reproductive tendencies which are associated with dominant power relations support the preservation and even the escalation of socioenvironmental oppressions. Therefore, Misiaszek argues that the goal of ecopedagogy is to push for transformative action by exposing how socioenvironmental connections oppress individuals and societies (280).

2.5 Ecopoetry

In the introduction of this degree project, it was mentioned that ecopoetry is poetry with a strong ecological emphasis or message. Bryson writes that ecopoetic lines as well as entire ecopoems have been written by many poets even before the environmental movement (3). In other words, there are poems which show the general characteristics associated with ecopoetry, and it is not the case that for the first time in history poems are being produced which acknowledge the
interconnectedness within nature and strives to interact respectfully with all of the natural world. Bryson also mentions how the widespread emphasis on ecology is a relatively new occurrence (3). The difference in the poems is that the ecopoets who write them are aiming to present a world as a community, rather than a world of creatures and natural beings with whom the privileged human interacts. The justification and need for this type of exhortation, according to Bryson is what is really new since we are faced with environmental crises that humans have not previously faced (3). I tend to agree with Bryson since I believe that the current state of the world requires more action from individuals and societies. The degradation of the world according to me started with the industrial revolution and continues with the agendas and forces of the oil companies and world leaders who seek profit before agreeing on what would be best in order to create a sustainable future.
3 Material and method
This section of the paper will be devoted to describing the selection of poems and which methods that have been used for the analyses. As mentioned earlier in the introduction, the poems and the song lyric were chosen to represent the varying types of texts commonly used while teaching poetry in upper secondary school. The methods that are used are based on the different approaches that were presented in the background.

3.1 The selection of poems
As mentioned by Bruce (2011, p.13), we reveal our values through the texts we choose to read as well as how we choose to approach them. One thing that I would like to show through this degree project is that through ecocritical readings, and with the right approach, teachers can use different kinds of poems and song lyrics to tackle the most important problem of our time, namely sustainable development. To be able to accomplish that, I chose two different poems and a song lyric to display the varying types of texts that are commonly used by teachers.

I have mentioned ecopoetry several times through this degree project. It is worth noting, however, that although Bryson’s characteristics of ecopoetry have guided me in my selections, I would not claim that any of these selections necessarily should be regarded as ecopoems. The criteria for an ecopoem would be that it contains an ecological and biological perspective that recognizes how the nature of the world is interdependent; a caring attitude for the relationship with human and non-human nature; and a skepticism which usually tends to condemn an overtechnologized modern world and warn about the possibility of ecological catastrophe. I have not chosen the poems on the assumptions that they are ecopoems, but rather because they convey important questions about social issues and the environment. As such I believe that the texts could be analyzed and worked into discussions regarding sustainable development.

The first poem I selected was the Romantic poem “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” by William Wordsworth. It was written somewhere between 1804 and 1807 and published for the first time in 1807. A revised version of the poem was later published in 1815. While the poem was not well received initially, it has grown to become one of the most well-known poems in the English language. “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” is widely used by teachers in the English-speaking world and often brought forth as an example in order to show how to approach a text ecocritically. Regarding the structure of the poem, it consists of four stanzas with each stanza containing six lines. The stanzas follow a quatrains-couplet rhyme scheme while each line of the poem is written in iambic tetrameter.
Andrea Gibson’s poem “Andrew” is my second choice and it is meant to represent a contemporary poem that might be used in a classroom. The poem is part of the collection *The Madness Vase*, which was published in 2012. Many of Andrea Gibson’s poems focus on gender norms, politics, social reform, and the struggles LGBTQ people face in today’s society. This poem is no exception, as it handles the topic of not conforming to the gender norms we have in our society. Since the poem is written in free verse it doesn’t follow a specific rhyme scheme, though it does contain irregular rhyming. There is not a certain structure or form regarding the stanzas either if one looks for a metrical pattern.

My last selection is the José Gonzales’ song “Every Age”, which is included on his album *Vestiges & Claws*. The song was released in 2015 and it brings forth a question regarding our collective responsibility for the time we have on this earth, but also the consequences of our actions. It is written in free verse and does not contain a specific rhyme scheme although rhymes occur in the text. Anaphors, however, are used to a great extent. José Gonzalez is Swedish, but I chose the song since it is written in English and the course plan does not specify that texts are restricted to writers who are native English speakers. In an appendix to the course plan in English, it even says that communication in English should not be limited by a nation’s borders. It should be noted how English is used by people with other native languages as an international language of communication as well.

### 3.2 The approach towards the poems

My approach towards analyzing these poems and the song lyric was to look for how both built and unbuilt nature was portrayed in the texts. I also wanted to look for different aspects of sustainable development that could be brought up in discussions that the analyses are supposed to result in. Bruce mentions how there are approaches of reading green that are readily applicable to any selection teachers want to use in the classroom (16). Those methods for reading green generally involve ideas for approaching literature in ways that explore the world and all the surroundings or environments in which human and non-human species carry on with their daily lives.

The most likely tactic for reading green, according to Bruce, is to analyze how characters, actors, and agents in literature affect the setting or stage of the narrative or vice versa (16). She argues that other approaches towards reading green could be to imagine scenarios where we can explore the consequences human behavior has on the planet, the flora and fauna, and the impact of “nature” on human experience as it is depicted in the settings of literature.
Furthermore, she writes that we might engage students in reading green by engaging them in a dialogue from a more ecocritically informed perspective about literature and its relationship to environmental concerns and nature in general.

Bruce writes that we can ask students to consider the potential damaging effects of human behavior on the natural world (17). We might even ask them to think of ways to become less anthropocentric and more ecocentric in their attitudes and behaviors. Through reading green, Bruce argues, we can also help students learn compelling motives for thinking beyond themselves and work to rebuild mankind’s relationship with the planet.
4 Analyses

This section will focus on the analyses of the three texts that were chosen for this degree project. Each part of this section will focus on one of the texts. In order to make the analyses easier to follow, larger excerpts of the texts will be avoided. The full excerpts of the texts can instead be found in the appendices at the end of this essay.

4.1 I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud

The poem “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” by William Wordsworth begins with the speaker walking outdoors by the lakeside and experiencing nature. As the speaker is walking, he stumbles upon a field of daffodils. After the first stanza has set the scene, the next two stanzas move on to describe that picturesque image of the daffodils “fluttering and dancing in the breeze”. In the last stanza the speaker concludes the poem by recounting how he tends to look back at that scene whenever he is preoccupied with serious thought in order to find happiness.

One could argue that the speaker in this poem is mostly an observer, which has to do with fact that he does not actively engage in his surroundings or interact with nature. The speaker’s depictions of the landscape are romanticized, and it is almost as if the speaker is a tourist visiting a new and exciting place. As with everything that is new and exciting, it can be difficult to notice the issues that might be hiding beneath the surface. Furthermore, the speaker is selective in his experiences. From an ecocritical point of view it can be worth discussing why the speaker is focusing on the fields of golden daffodils, whilst ignoring the degradation of nature elsewhere. In other words, whether or not it is possible to truly care for the environment if one cannot see the issues in our treatment of it. One comparison that can be found in real life is the difference between how we treat our national parks and how we treat nature elsewhere. On one hand, we establish national parks to preserve nature and regulate our treatment of it. On the other hand, we are devastating rainforests, which play a great part in the production of oxygen on earth.

Despite the aforementioned arguments, there are also parts of the poem that highlight the relationship between man and nature. Even though the speaker could be considered an observer of nature for not actively engaging with it, the descriptions the speaker provide of his surroundings hints at a deeper relationship. For example, the poem starts with the phrase “I wandered lonely as a cloud”. By comparing himself to a cloud, the speaker personifies nature. The same can be said about the daffodils which are “fluttering and dancing in the breeze”. Through these personifications, the nature becomes alive and active, which in turn could
suggest that nature is not only meant to be observed. This is demonstrated even further when the speaker refers to the daffodils, along with other parts of his surroundings, as close friends.

Richard Gravil writes that the Romantics were the first to view humans as a part of nature and not “lords of creation” (13-14). He also writes that Wordsworth more than any other Romantic poet can be associated with the idea of how humans feel better by living close to nature, and that we are part of nature. Gravil also explains how it was not uncommon for writers of Wordsworth’s age to believe that everything in nature was alive, similar to the descriptions of the daffodils in the poem (14). Many writers who lived during Wordsworth’s time were pantheists according to Gravil, which means that they believe that God was everywhere and everything, and in everything (14). In other words, God was a name which was given to the sum total of all things. Some even believed that every form of being has its own life and ability to feel, and that it is an obligation for humans to respect every living thing.

All in all, it could be said that there exists a dichotomy in Wordsworth’s poem, which has to do with whether or not the speaker has a certain attachment to the place he describes. On one hand, the speaker could be considered an observer. As such, nature becomes a place he can escape to, and a place he then exploits for his own self-fulfillment. On the other hand, it can be said that the speaker shows admiration and appreciation for the place. The different personifications that incarnate nature also hint at a deeper and more profound relationship between the speaker and his surroundings.

4.2 Andrew

Andrea Gibson’s poem “Andrew” starts with the speaker retelling how she used to behave like a boy when she was younger. This analogy is then followed by the speaker’s descriptions of common preconceptions about boys’ behavior. She also hints at how her behavior would go against what was considered “normal” behavior for a girl. The first stanza then ends with the speaker exclaiming that she never thought that she would grow up to be a man, but she did not think that she would grow up to be a woman neither. According to her neither of those categories fits her. This leads into the principal theme of the poem, which is gender norms. Human nature plays a big part in the poem as arguments are made against conforming to the norms that are prevalent in our society. Nature is often used as a means to express domination over minority groups in order to control opinions regarding sexual orientation, gender norms and ethnicity among other areas. What the poem does to a great extent is bring forth questions
regarding social injustice and how our consumerist ways strengthen our conceptions about gender norms and how things should be.

In the third stanza the speaker mentions how she would proclaim “this Adam and Eve thing isn’t really working for me, what about all the people in between?” Religion has had an impact on people in general and has affected the thoughts of many throughout history. By mentioning that she does not relate to the rigid confines of heterosexuality, the speaker also highlights how religion has played a part in determining what is natural and unnatural in our society. One does not need to look far to find how homosexuality is condemned and deemed as “unnatural” in the Bible.

"26 Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. 27 In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.” (New International Version, Romans 1: 26-27)

Although the poem only hints at how religion plays a part in the lives of many people, it is noticeable as one delves deeper into the implications from the previously mentioned line and the block quote that religion is one way for the majority group to control opinions regarding sexual orientation. In other words, the majority group is able to oppress the minority group by elevating themselves while alienating the minority group and expressing domination. This is accomplished by subordinating the minority group and highlighting their inferiority based on the lack of the majority group’s characteristics, which is how the “logic of domination” works according to Gaard (323).

As the fourth stanza begins there is a shift of focus towards consumerism and the effect that marketing has on gender roles. Consequently, the subject of gender norms is brought forth as well. Similar to how religion was handled earlier in the poem, there are subtle hints of how consumerism affects the way we think and how we orient ourselves in our society. In the stanza the speaker explains how she did not feel comfortable enough to reveal to her classmate in third grade that she did not like to play with Barbies or G.I. Joes. Both toys are known for being heavily marketed towards respective gender, with Barbies being directed towards girls and G.I. Joe being directed towards boys. It becomes evident in this passage that there are expectations on young girls and boys to act and behave in certain ways or else they will be considered unnatural in comparison to their friends. This leads into the next stanza, where the speaker
argues that gender is only a way to limit us as human beings. She also argues that our way of thinking is formed at an early age when we are too young to even have formed our own opinions about the world that we reside in.

The rest of the poem then uses conformity and change in contrast to one another in order to show how mankind is always evolving. On one hand, we create certain laws, both visible and invisible, in order to restrict our free will. This leads to social exclusion, where certain people feel like they do not belong because of their sexual orientation or preferred gender. On the other hand, it is in our nature to change and evolve. In the poem, the speaker proclaims that G.I. Joe is only plastic, and not even the plastic that bends. She then continues by explaining how she wants to bend in a thousand different ways, which in turn suggests that we need to get to know who we are before we even determine if we want to be regarded as a boy or a girl. According to the speaker we should not even feel the need to adhere to a specific gender or sexual orientation. All in all, the only thing that every human wants in the end is to feel loved or considered an equal by his or her peers.

4.3 Every Age

The song “Every Age” by José Gonzalez begins with the phrase “every age has its turn; every branch of the tree has to learn”. In this phrase the speaker uses the tree as a symbol for life. As such, the tree is meant to represent humankind, and its different branches are meant to show each generation and the differences between our various nations and cultures. Furthermore, there is an implication that every generation across all humankind has to find a way forward towards a brighter future in spite of how our many societies are different from one another. In the second stanza of the song lyric, the speaker uses the seed and the spade to describe the interrelatedness between built and unbuilt nature. Through that analogy the speaker implies that they cannot exist without one another and that both are needed to create a home. As such, home is a place which do not only encompass our immediate surroundings such as our house, but also the environment. In order for us as a species to exist on this earth, we need to care for both.

In the next two stanzas the speaker discusses change and how we will have to live with the consequences of our actions. Throughout the third stanza the speaker mentions how some aspects of our lives may stay the same while others change, and some changes are so small that they might even pass us by without us noticing them. The speaker also mentions that there are things in our traditions and cultures which are worth hanging onto, while others need improvement. Although there might be traditions that are meaningful to a certain group of
people, it might be wise to move on from them in order to create a better world where we care for all of mankind and the environment which surrounds us.

In the fourth stanza the speaker explains that the aforementioned need of change can be more or less obvious to every person. What we do know, however, is that we will all have to take the consequences of our actions, which becomes evident when the speaker proclaims that “…we are here, together; reaping what time and what we have sown”. In other words, we all have different ideas about what needs to be done in order to have a sustainable future but if we choose to continue down the same path and not take action against things like pollution and social injustice, we will eventually be the ones affected by the negative outcome.

The speaker begins the fifth stanza by explaining how we do not choose where we are born, and under which circumstances we will have to live our lives. He does, however, explain that we can learn how to know ourselves in relation to the world we reside in. He also mentions the world as a “globe in the void” which implies that we only have this world and once it is consumed, we will not have another one. As far as we know, everything outside of our earth is an uninhabitable void. Because of that we will not get another chance if we do not do everything in our power to prevent an ecological apocalypse. The poem ends with a last stanza where the speaker urges the reader, or listener, to take the knowledge that she or he has and use it to build a better place for the future.
5 Discussion

This last section of the paper begins with an evaluation of how sustainable development can be addressed through ecocritical readings of poems and song lyrics. After that follows a discussion on how the texts that were chosen for this degree project can be incorporated in a classroom situation. The essay is then concluded with a short afterthought about which ways that could be taken in order to follow up on my results.

5.1 Addressing sustainable development through ecocritical readings

Through my ecocritical readings of the different texts there were certain things that became evident to me, which I would not have considered before reading the texts. One such thing was that it might be difficult to touch upon all aspects of sustainable development in one single poem or song lyric. While I did not consider it for this degree project, one could try to select a poem or song lyric based on a theme which adheres to UN’s sustainable development goals. By doing so, students will have an easier time connecting the poems and song lyrics to problems that occur in the real world.

By looking at my analyses of the poems and the song lyric it becomes evident that it is possible to raise questions regarding sustainable development from different perspectives. Through Wordsworth’s poem “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” it is possible to look at the ecological aspects of sustainable development. One of the more promising aspects of the poem is that there is a dilemma, where you can look at the poem through two different lenses. On one hand, it can be looked at as viewing the interrelatedness between nature and mankind. On the other hand, it can be viewed as a sort of escapism, where nature is only there in order for humans to behold. In Andrea Gibson’s poem “Andrew” social injustice can be brought forth as a means to discuss social sustainability. Through the poem it is possible to discuss how minority groups are treated in our society and how nature is used as a tool to make people conform to our societal norms. For example, the poem also shows how religion is used as a means to make people conform by pointing at how homosexuality is portrayed in the bible. Another example is how consumerism strengthens gender roles. Both examples show instances were societal norms are detrimental to minority groups. Discussions regarding both ecological and social sustainability can be brought forth through José González song lyric “Every Age”. The song lyric in itself is also easy to interpret which makes it quite good to use as a starting point when teaching students to read green and use it as a means to discuss sustainable development. The poem brings forth questions regarding our collective responsibility and how we have to work towards a common
goal or accept the consequences of our actions, which would be the end of the world as we know it.

5.2 How could the texts be incorporated in a classroom situation?

Based on my analyses and how sustainable development can be addressed through the texts, there are certain aspects that are important to consider before incorporating any of the texts in a classroom situation. First and foremost, I would like to highlight the importance of selection and content of texts. As mentioned previously, our values are revealed through the imaginative and rhetorical selections we choose to read as well as how we choose to read them. Therefore, it is important to understand why one chooses to use a certain poem or song lyric in the classroom. It cannot just be that it is a text that one is particularly fond of or because it shows the form or structure of a certain kind of poem. Neither can it be too open for discussion regarding what it is about. Do not mistake me for wanting to hamper students’ opportunities to interpret a poem or song lyric but if a teacher is certain about his, or her, interpretation, it becomes easier to provide students with the necessary tools to both interpret the poem and learn the important life lessons that we want to teach. In other words, it becomes important to know what questions we want to evoke before introducing the texts in the classroom. In this instance it is sustainable development, but as was mentioned previously it is also important that we think about which aspect of sustainable development we want to discuss since one text may not include all of them.

If upper secondary school students are to be able to discuss sustainable development, the terminology would need to be introduced to them and there would need to be some sort of explanation regarding the differences between ecological, social and economic sustainability. After that it is important to think about which approach would be best to use for each poem or song lyric. Perhaps it would be best to introduce the students to a song lyric like “Every Age” and let them analyze it in groups before opening up for a classroom discussion regarding sustainable development. Since “Every Age” is straightforward it could work well with an open discussion regarding its contents. A more difficult poem like “Andrew” would perhaps require a little more guidance with questions that can lead the students towards discussions regarding sustainable development. By handing out questions to guide the students, it would be easier for them to notice implications and more difficult areas of the poem such as how consumerism and religion are used to the detriment of certain groups in our society. For “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” I believe that it would be better to use place-based learning to
some extent. While it might be good to open up with a discussion about the poem and the dilemma about how it portrays nature, it would be good to let the students visit the outdoors to observe their surroundings. Either for using it as a means to open up for further discussions about the environment or for crafting their own poem where they write down their thoughts about their local environment.

As mentioned previously in this essay, environmental perspectives are an overarching theme in the curriculum. Even though environmental issues are not explicitly mentioned in the course plans for the English subject I do feel like they should gain more attention from teachers. Sustainability is a wicked problem, which makes it even more important for teachers to not refrain from any conflicts that may arise from discussing the subject. I believe that an approach with deep discussions and conflicting views on the subject matter should be encouraged. From my point of view, it can get students more engaged in the subject and help them develop into more responsible citizens who will actively engage in dilemmas that are affecting their present and future. My presumption is that there is some truth to what Læssøe has to say about participatory processes, namely that deep ideological conflicts are avoided. I believe that conflicts are stigmatized in a sense and avoided to an extent by teachers because it can harm a group’s dynamic. As a teacher, however, one should try to find processes where conflicting views can be handled and turned into a learning experience. Not that there does not exist some form of didactic situations where conflicting views are brought up, but far too often those topics are distant to the students’ experiences. One such topic that I have witnessed being used for is the death penalty. The death penalty is not a thing in Sweden today, and as such it is distant from what students’ experience. Even though it can be inconvenient or unpleasant to make room for discussions where deep ideological conflicts are present, I believe that it better prepares students for their future.

5.3 The Way Forward
I believe that there are two obvious ways forward to take after this degree project. The first would be to analyze even more texts in order to see if my methods are applicable to any other number of texts that are readily available in the classroom. It would also be interesting to see if there are song lyrics or poems that can bring forth not just one or two of the three different aspects of sustainability, but maybe all of the aspects. The other way would be to apply my methods in a classroom situation and see how it would work with an upper secondary school class. I have showcased that it is possible to address sustainable development through
ecocritical readings of poems, but the next step would be to see if such a task would suit an upper secondary school student well and what could be learned from that task.
6 Appendices

This section of the essay was created in order to make the poems and the song lyric more accessible to the readers of this degree project. The two poems and the song lyric appear in their entirety and are listed according to when they appear in the essay. My reason for including a whole section of this paper to the poems and the song lyric is that I think that they can serve as a reference point while the readers follow my ecocritical analyses of them. They will also be of relevance when I deliver my arguments for how they can be implemented in the classroom. I could have taken the alternative route and included them in the essay, but I believe that it serves them, and the essay, better if they appear in a separate section. My argument is that, while they serve as a reference point, they will most likely clutter the essay or distract from the purpose.
6.1 Appendix A
I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud
by William Wordsworth

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company:
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.
Andrew

by Andrea Gibson

When I was a kid I would secretly
call myself Andrew.
I would tug at the crotch of my pants
the way only pubescent boys do.
Ran around pounding on my bare chest like Tarzan.
It’s not that I thought I’d grow up to be a man.
I just never thought I’d grow up to be a woman either.

From what I could tell neither
of those categories seemed to fit me.

But believe me
I knew from a very young age to
never say, “Dad, this Adam or Eve thing
isn’t really working for me. What about
all the people in between?”

In the third grade
Lynette Lyons asked me where all of my Barbies were.
I lied and told her I got in trouble
and my mother took them away.
I didn’t dare say, “Barbie sucks, Lynette.”

And for the record: so does G.I. Joe.

I want to grow into something
nobody has ever seen before
and gender is just one of the ways
we are boxed in and labeled
before we are ever able to speak
who we believe we are
or who we dream we will become.

Like drumbeats forever changing their rhythm
I am living today as someone
I had not yet become yesterday,
and tonight I will borrow only pieces
of who I am right now
to carry with me to tomorrow.

No I’m not gay.
No I’m not straight.
And I’m sure as hell not bisexual, damnit.
I am whoever I am when I am it.

Loving whoever you are when the stars shine
And whoever you’ll be when the sun rises,
crew cuts or curls
or that really bad hair phase in-between

I like steam
rising from the body of a one-night stand.
I like holding hands
for three months before kissing.

I like imagining your body is Saturn,
my body ten thousand rings wrapped around you.

You wanted to be a Buddhist nun once.
Last night you held my cervix between your fingers.
I thanked gods I don’t even believe in for your changing.

Tell me we’ll be naming our children Beautiful
and nothing else.
Tell Barbie she can go now.
Tell G.I. Joe to put his gun down and find a boyfriend.
Or a girlfriend. Or a girl-boyfriend
Fuck it, G.I. Joe just needs a friend.
He’s plastic, and not even the kind of plastic that bends.

I want to bend in a thousand directions like the sun does.
Like love does.
Like time might stop
so the hands of the clock can hold each other.

We can hold each other
like I held these words for too many years
on the tip of my tongue…

“I am my mother’s daughter
I am midnight’s sun.
You can find me on the moon
waxing and waning,
my heart full of petals,
eyevery single one begging love me, love me
love me.

Whoever I am.
Whoever I become.”
6.3 Appendix C

Every Age

by José Gonzalez

Every age has its turn
Every branch of the tree has to learn
Learn to grow, find its way,
Make the best of this short-lived stay

Take this seed, take this spade
Take this dream of a better day
Take your time, build a home
Build a place where we all can belong

Some things change, some remain
Some will pass us unnoticed by
What to focus on, to improve upon
In the face of our ancient tribes

Feels so clear, feels so obvious
To each one on their own
But we are here, together
Reaping what time and what we have sown

We don't choose where we're born
We don't choose in what pocket or form
But we can learn to know
Ourselves on this globe in the void

Take this mind, take this pen
Take this dream of a better land
Take your time, build a home
Build a place where we all... can belong
7 Works cited


