

ECOPOETICS OF UZBEK PROSE IN THE INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

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Abstract

This article explores the ecopoetic dimensions of Uzbek prose produced during the period of independence, with particular attention to the concepts of *material agency* and *ecocide*. Drawing on contemporary ecocritical theory, the study examines how natural elements—land, water, flora, fauna, and climate—function not merely as background settings but as active agents shaping narrative meaning and ethical discourse. The phenomenon of ecocide, understood as large-scale environmental destruction resulting from human activity, is analyzed as a central thematic and ideological concern in post-independence Uzbek prose. The article argues that Uzbek writers reinterpret nature as a moral and cultural subject, reflecting national memory, post-Soviet trauma, and ecological responsibility. Through ecopoetic analysis, the study demonstrates how literature becomes a space for environmental consciousness and resistance against anthropocentric paradigms.

Keywords

ecopoetics, Uzbek prose, material agency, ecocide, ecocriticism, post-independence literature

The period of Uzbekistan's independence marked a profound transformation in literary consciousness, particularly in prose. Freed from ideological constraints of the Soviet era, writers began to reassess historical memory, national identity, and the human relationship with nature. One of the most significant yet understudied aspects of this transformation is the emergence of ecopoetic thinking in Uzbek prose. Ecopoetics, as an interdisciplinary field combining literary studies, environmental philosophy, and cultural theory, provides a productive framework for understanding how literature responds to ecological crises and environmental ethics.

In post-independence Uzbek prose, nature is no longer portrayed as a passive landscape subordinated to human will. Instead, it emerges as a dynamic force endowed with agency, memory, and resistance. This shift aligns with global ecocritical trends while retaining distinctive local and cultural features rooted in Central Asian environmental history.

Ecopoetics challenges the traditional anthropocentric worldview by foregrounding the agency of non-human matter. The concept of *material agency* suggests that natural elements—soil, rivers, deserts, animals—participate in meaning-making processes and influence human destinies within literary narratives. In Uzbek prose, this approach resonates deeply due to the region's historical dependence on land and water, particularly in agrarian and nomadic contexts.

Material agency in Uzbek prose manifests through:

- the symbolic resistance of land to exploitation,
- the voice of rivers and deserts as witnesses of historical trauma,
- cyclical representations of nature opposing linear human progress.

Such representations disrupt the human–nature hierarchy and propose an ethical model based on coexistence rather than domination.

The concept of *ecocide* occupies a central place in the ecopoetics of independence-era Uzbek prose. Ecocide here refers not only to environmental destruction but also to the cultural and spiritual devastation caused by ecological violence. The drying of seas, soil degradation, and loss of biodiversity—often linked to Soviet industrial policies—are reimagined in literature as moral catastrophes.

Uzbek prose writers depict ecocide through:

- ruined landscapes symbolizing broken historical continuity,
- suffering ecosystems paralleling human psychological trauma,
- silence and emptiness as narrative strategies reflecting ecological loss.

Importantly, ecocide is portrayed not as an abstract global issue but as an intimate, localized tragedy embedded in everyday life and national memory.

In independence-period prose, nature becomes a repository of collective memory. Landscapes carry traces of colonial exploitation, forced modernization, and environmental neglect. Through ecopoetic narration, writers reconnect ecological degradation with issues of identity, sovereignty, and moral responsibility.

Nature's suffering often mirrors the nation's struggle for self-definition. This parallelism reinforces the idea that ecological restoration is inseparable from cultural and ethical renewal. The land is not merely owned; it remembers, responds, and demands accountability.

The study of ecopoetics and environmental representation in post-independence Uzbek prose is situated at the intersection of literary criticism, cultural studies, and contemporary ecocritical theory. International literary scholarship has increasingly emphasized the role of literature in responding to ecological crises, arguing that narrative forms shape environmental consciousness and ethical responsibility. Ecocritical theorists have demonstrated that modern prose no longer treats nature as a passive backdrop but as an active force that influences narrative structure, character psychology, and ideological meaning. Within this framework, the concept of material agency has become central, as scholars argue that non-human entities such as land, water, and climate possess narrative and symbolic power capable of shaping human actions and historical outcomes.

In global literary studies, ecopoetics has been widely applied to postcolonial and post-industrial literatures, where environmental destruction is often linked to political domination and cultural trauma. Researchers emphasize that ecological degradation functions as both a material and symbolic process, reflecting the consequences of anthropocentric ideologies. Studies of post-Soviet literature in particular highlight how environmental catastrophe becomes a metaphor for systemic collapse, loss of ethical orientation, and disrupted collective memory. In this context, the notion of ecocide is interpreted not merely as physical environmental damage but as a form of cultural violence that erases traditional relationships between humans and the natural world.

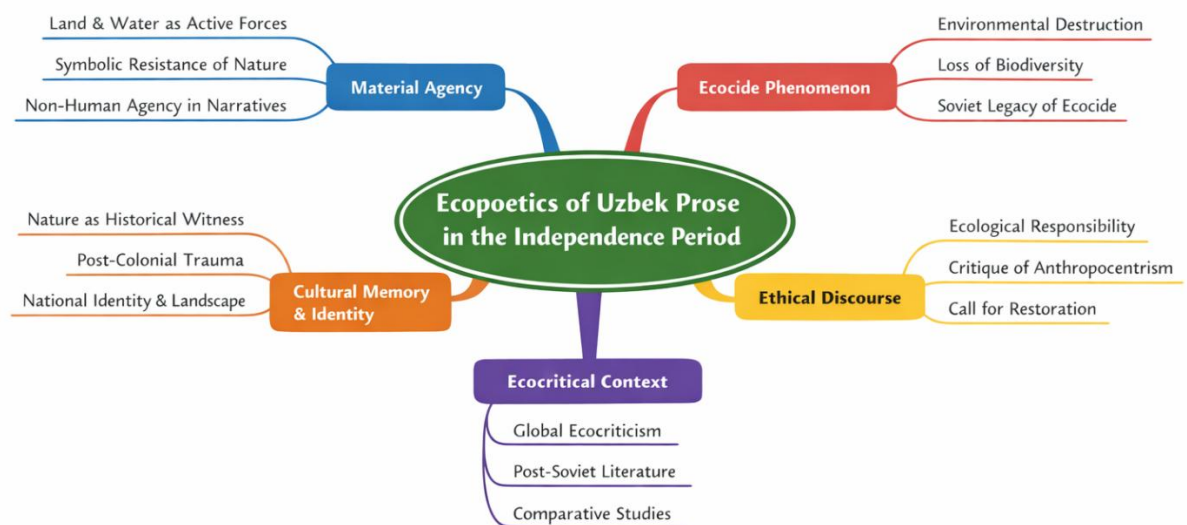
Uzbek and Central Asian scholars approach ecological themes primarily through the lenses of national identity, historical memory, and moral responsibility. Literary researchers note that land and water occupy a sacred position in traditional Uzbek worldview, where nature is closely connected with ethical norms, spirituality, and communal life. As a result, environmental destruction in Uzbek prose is often portrayed as a violation of cultural continuity rather than solely an ecological problem. Local studies emphasize that independence-era prose reflects a growing awareness of environmental trauma inherited from the Soviet period, particularly in relation to forced agricultural policies, water mismanagement, and landscape degradation. These works underline that writers reinterpret nature as a witness to historical injustice and as a moral judge of human actions.

Comparative literary analyses conducted by Uzbek scholars demonstrate that post-independence prose exhibits a shift from utilitarian depictions of nature toward symbolic and agentive representations. Nature is frequently personified, endowed with memory, silence, resistance, and suffering, which aligns with international theories of material agency. Researchers argue that this narrative strategy allows writers to articulate ecological critique indirectly, avoiding didacticism while reinforcing ethical reflection. In many studies, natural elements are shown to influence plot development and character transformation, thereby functioning as active participants in the narrative rather than decorative descriptions.

International case studies of ecopoetics further support the relevance of this approach for analyzing Uzbek prose. Research on environmental literature from Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe demonstrates that ecological narratives often emerge most strongly in societies that have experienced rapid modernization and ecological exploitation. Scholars observe that literature from these regions frequently links environmental degradation with identity crises and postcolonial trauma. This theoretical insight is particularly applicable to Uzbek prose, where ecological damage is intertwined with the search for post-independence self-definition and moral renewal.

Despite growing scholarly interest, the ecopoetics of Uzbek prose remains insufficiently explored within a systematic theoretical framework. Existing local studies tend to focus on thematic analysis or symbolic imagery without fully integrating contemporary ecocritical concepts such as material agency and ecocide. At the same time, international ecocritical research rarely includes Uzbek literature, which limits comparative perspectives. This gap indicates the need for an integrated approach that combines global ecopoetic theory with region-specific cultural and historical analysis.

Overall, the reviewed literature demonstrates that ecopoetics provides a productive methodological lens for understanding independence-era Uzbek prose. Both local and international studies confirm that ecological representation in literature extends beyond environmental description to encompass ethical, historical, and cultural dimensions. By synthesizing these perspectives, the present study positions Uzbek prose within broader ecocritical discourse while highlighting its unique contribution to the literary articulation of environmental responsibility and cultural memory.



Ecopoetics in Uzbek prose functions as an ethical intervention. By granting agency to material elements, writers question utilitarian attitudes toward nature and advocate for ecological consciousness grounded in cultural tradition. Literature thus becomes a form of ecological testimony, warning against irreversible destruction while envisioning alternative modes of coexistence.

This ethical dimension is particularly significant in the post-Soviet context, where environmental damage is inseparable from historical injustice. Ecopoetic narratives encourage readers to reconsider responsibility—not only toward nature but also toward future generations.

The ecopoetics of Uzbek prose in the independence period reveals a profound rethinking of the human–nature relationship. Through the lenses of material agency and ecocide, writers

transform nature into an active participant in narrative, history, and ethics. Ecological destruction is represented not only as environmental loss but as cultural and moral trauma.

This study demonstrates that ecopoetic analysis offers valuable insights into contemporary Uzbek literature, positioning it within global ecocritical discourse while preserving its unique regional and cultural specificity. Ultimately, independence-era Uzbek prose affirms literature's role as a powerful medium for ecological awareness and ethical reflection.

Table: Thematic Framework of the Article

Theoretical Concept	Core Definition	Literary Function in Uzbek Prose	Analytical Focus	Illustrative Example (Generalized)
Ecopoetics	A literary approach that examines the relationship between textual form and ecological thought	Reconfigures nature from background to narrative subject	Narrative voice, symbolism, ethical stance	Landscapes shaping plot development and character fate
Material Agency	The capacity of non-human matter to influence events and meanings	Nature acts as an agent rather than an object	Land, water, climate as active forces	Soil degradation affecting human destiny
Ecocide	Systematic environmental destruction caused by human activity	Represents moral and cultural catastrophe	Ecological trauma, loss of balance	Destroyed ecosystems symbolizing social collapse
Nature as Memory	Nature as a repository of historical and cultural memory	Links landscape to national and collective trauma	Postcolonial and post-Soviet memory	Silent deserts recalling past exploitation
Ethical Discourse	Literature as a medium of ecological responsibility	Critiques anthropocentrism	Moral accountability, sustainability	Calls for coexistence with nature

The theoretical foundation of this study is grounded in ecopoetics as a contemporary interdisciplinary approach that integrates literary analysis with ecological philosophy and cultural ethics. Ecopoetics challenges the anthropocentric paradigm that has traditionally dominated literary representation by foregrounding the agency of non-human elements within narrative structures. In this framework, nature is no longer perceived as a passive setting but as an active participant capable of influencing human consciousness, historical development, and ethical judgment.

One of the central theoretical concepts employed in this study is material agency, which refers to the capacity of physical matter—such as land, water, and climate—to exert influence within literary narratives. From an ecopoetic perspective, material agency disrupts the hierarchy between human and non-human actors by attributing narrative force to natural elements. In

independence-period Uzbek prose, this concept is particularly relevant due to the region's historical dependence on agriculture and water resources. For example, the land is frequently depicted not merely as cultivated territory but as a living entity that reacts to exploitation through infertility, silence, or resistance. Such representations imply that ecological imbalance is not accidental but a consequence of ethical failure.

Closely related to material agency is the concept of ecocide, which functions as both a literal and symbolic phenomenon in literary discourse. Ecocide is understood here as large-scale environmental destruction that results in irreversible damage to ecosystems and cultural memory. In post-Soviet literary contexts, ecocide often reflects the consequences of forced modernization and industrial exploitation. Uzbek prose of the independence period portrays ecological devastation as a form of collective trauma, where dried rivers, ruined fields, and abandoned villages symbolize not only environmental loss but also the erosion of traditional values and communal life. These narratives reveal that ecological destruction is inseparable from social and moral disintegration.

Another significant theoretical dimension is the representation of nature as a bearer of memory. Ecopoetic theory emphasizes that landscapes store historical experience and cultural meaning, functioning as silent witnesses to human actions. In Uzbek prose, nature frequently embodies the memory of colonial domination, ecological negligence, and disrupted harmony between humans and their environment. The recurrence of barren land or disappearing water sources serves as a narrative reminder of past injustice and unresolved responsibility. Through this strategy, writers transform natural space into a mnemonic structure that preserves collective trauma and challenges historical amnesia.

The ethical dimension of ecopoetics is central to the theoretical framework of this study. By depicting nature as an agent and victim, Uzbek prose articulates a critique of anthropocentrism, exposing the moral consequences of viewing the environment solely as a resource. Ecopoetic narratives often avoid direct moralizing and instead rely on symbolic and narrative strategies to encourage ethical reflection. Characters who ignore the signs of ecological imbalance are frequently portrayed as alienated or spiritually impoverished, whereas moments of harmony with nature are associated with moral clarity and cultural continuity.

From a theoretical standpoint, ecopoetics in Uzbek prose functions as a form of ecological resistance. It resists utilitarian ideologies inherited from the Soviet period and proposes an alternative worldview based on coexistence, responsibility, and respect for material agency. By integrating environmental concerns into questions of identity, memory, and ethics, independence-era Uzbek prose aligns with global ecocritical discourse while preserving its unique cultural specificity.

In conclusion, the theoretical framework of ecopoetics, material agency, and ecocide provides a coherent lens for analyzing contemporary Uzbek prose. These concepts allow for a deeper understanding of how literature reflects ecological trauma, critiques anthropocentric values, and constructs ethical narratives that address both environmental and cultural survival.

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