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Buck and Woman: Victims of the Same Arrow in Oates's Story "The Buck"

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Abstract:

In the contemporary Anthropocene, humans measure the value of materials, animals, and plants based on their benefits. Their self-centric presence in nature has severely threatened biodiversity and the climate. This study reads Carol Joyce Oates's short story "The Buck" to examine how it portrays emerging ecological threats. The story introduces two human characters—Wayne Kunz, a hunter, and Melanie Snyder, an ecologically conscientious person. Kunz has a thirst for animals, and he has ferocious hunting skills. A buck is shot with an arrow and wounded. Snyder attempts to save it but loses her life in the injury caused by the buck's antler. Finally, both will face untimely death. The study raises a question: Why does the juxtaposition of two diametrically opposing views of humans toward the same animal suggest this? While analyzing the text drawing on the theoretical concepts from ecofeminism, the study finds that the author juxtaposes two antithetical views of humans to make a sharp critique of androcentric ideology, which has been the root cause of the harms to both living and non-living beings.

Keywords:

Animal rights,
Ecocriticism,
Ecofeminism,
Hunting

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Activities like that of Kunz have become serious threats to ecological sustenance. The study argues that it is necessary to control behaviors like those of Kunz and promote behaviors like those of Snyder. Finally, this study expects to contribute to developing a favorable human-nature nexus for sustainable ecology.

雄鹿与女人：奥茨短篇小说《雄鹿》中同一支箭的受害者

摘要：

在当代人类世，人类以效益为衡量物质、动物、植物的价值，以自我为中心地存在于自然界，严重威胁着生物多样性和气候。本文阅读了卡罗尔·乔伊斯·奥茨的短篇小说《雄鹿》，探讨其如何刻画新兴的生态威胁。故事介绍了两个人类角色——

猎人韦恩·昆茨和生态意识强的人梅兰妮·斯奈德。昆茨对动物有强烈的渴望，狩猎技巧也十分精湛。一只雄鹿被箭射中受伤，斯奈德试图挽救它，却因被雄鹿的鹿角刺伤而丧生。最终，两人都将面临英年早逝。这项研究提出了一个问题：为什么人类对同一种动物的两种截然相反的观点会暗示这一点？借助生态女性主义的理论概念对文本进行分析，本文发现作者将两种对立的人类观并置，对男性中心主义思想进行了尖锐的批判，而男性中心主义思想正是对生物和非生物造成伤害的根本原因。类似昆茨的行为已成为生态维持的严重威胁。本文认为有必要控制类似昆茨的行为，并促进类似斯奈德的行为。最后，本文希望为可持续生态发展良好的人与自然关系做出贡献。

关键词：动物权利、生态批评、生态女性主义、狩猎

1. Introduction

This study explores how humans measure the value of things, animals, and plants in terms of their personal benefits. Humans have been exploiting biodiversity and the physical surroundings so heedlessly that various unexpected symptoms of imbalance in ecology have widely risen. Human activities are responsible for the regular threat to vegetation, animals, or flora and fauna. Joyce Carol Oates's (1999) story, "The Buck," delineates how humans are drastically deteriorating the Earth planet. It vehemently critiques the androcentric mentality that exploits females and nature simultaneously. Wayne Kunz, as a hunter, is a representative androcentric character who shoots and wounds bucks. In contrast, Melanie Snyder, a female natural environment campaigner, endeavors to save the buck but ultimately loses her life in the cause of it. The wounded buck, suspiciously cautious of further attacks by the lady, tries to escape her as soon as possible. However, accidentally, its antler scratches her chest, letting blood flow freely. The lady finally passes away along with the buck in the same place: her body beneath the body of the buck. The two human characters represent contradictory views in the story. The hunter goes after the animals while the old lady looks after them. Why does the juxtaposition of diametrically opposing views of humans toward the same animal suggest this? The study focuses on this question. Significant research has not yet been conducted on this topic. Applying critical and theoretical insights from

ecofeminist scholars, this study concludes that by presenting such characters, the story makes a sharp critique of androcentric ideology, which has been the root cause of the contemporary threats and disturbances seen in ecology. The story calls urgently for equitable relations between man and woman and balanced relations between humans and nature for sustainable ecology.

2. Literature Review

Despite her fame as one of the most prolific contemporary American writers writing in different styles and genres, Oates's short story "The Buck" has not received significant critical research yet. Oates mostly raised issues of violence and evil that modern American society is facing, as well as the environmental crisis. The Buck discusses the issue of violence against animals and women. A spinster of 82 years who has fought against male domination over women and animals throughout her life finally sacrifices her life to the cause of a dying buck. This study examines the association of the woman and buck from ecofeminist perspective.

Ecofeminism as a critical theory emerged out of feminism and environmentalism, thus engaging insights from both. It sees the connections between women and nature. Gaard (1993) elaborates: "ecofeminists have described a number of connections between the oppressions of women and of nature that are significant to understanding why the environment is a feminist

issue” (p. 4). Karen (1993) reiterates, “for ecofeminists, nature is a feminist issue” (p. 4). Equating nature to woman, it deals with the issues of the oppression and exploitation of women and nature as “it is a holistic approach to all forms of domination—sex, race, species—not just a particularistic campaign for women’s own advancement (Salleh et al., 2017, p. 163). Ecofeminism links “the domination of nature” to the dominations” and posits that “both dominations must be eradicated” (Adams, 2022, p. 1).

Francoise d’Eaubonne, known as the originator of the term, used ‘ecofeminism’ for the first time in the field of environmental literature. Niamh Moor (2015) defined ecofeminism as “a belief in the interconnection of all living things” (p. 27). As Moor believes, ecofeminism analyzes all aspects of discriminatory and other beliefs of androcentrism and suggests the need to cultivate alternative modes for ecologically favorable practices among all flora and fauna. As an ecologically political movement, ecofeminism has been connected to a larger campaign. Moor holds:

Ecofeminism is more than identity politics; it represents an earth democracy across cultures and species. The diversity of people thinking and writing about ecofeminism has resulted in considerable confusion about what ecofeminism actually is, who ecofeminists are, and what they have to say (p. 40).

Unlike the narrow agenda of identity politics, and despite confusion in definitions or activists, ecofeminism has a wider political agenda of working for the well-being of all living and non-living organisms on Earth.

This study focuses on safeguarding the natural environment. Those who are concerned with environmental issues are ecologists and “Ecologists are concerned that human activity is destroying the viability of ecosystems” (Mellor, 2009, p. 252). The emergence of capitalism, supported by scientific achievements, has tremendously changed the living styles of human beings. Salleh (2017) argues that “ecological crisis is the inevitable effect of a Eurocentric capitalist patriarchal culture built on the domination of Nature” (p. 48). Modern civilization has been influenced by a Eurocentric capitalist patriarchal culture built on the dominance of nature. Salleh (2009) also linked ecofeminism to the “environmentalism of the poor women” whose experiences of poverty and pain “are unknown to men” (p. 291).

Unlike in the past, especially after the Industrial Revolution, human activities have been significantly influential in the destruction of nature. Thousands of dense forests have been regularly cleared for various purposes, consequently destroying the habitat of the wildlife. Various species of plants and animals have already declined, and some species are also declining. The ecology has been seriously disturbed. Ecofeminists see all this as a result of patriarchal ideology. Hence, they actively show concern for all kinds of exploitation

against women and nature. Regarding this, Moor contends, “ecofeminism involves activism as well as ideology and that both of these aspects arose simultaneously worldwide” (p. 43) to make the world aware of environmental degradation. The agenda of ecofeminism is not limited to domestic domination, discrimination, or violence of women; rather, it covers issues concerning the exploitation of the whole organisms: “ecofeminism is about connectedness and wholeness of theory and practice” (Mies, and Shiva, 2014, p. 14). The interconnectedness between humans and non-human entities is inseparable. Humans and nature are both theoretically and practically interconnected.

The ecological movement is one of the international liberation movements of the twentieth century. It strives for peace, social justice, and ecological responsibility. All plants and living beings have equal values for their contributions to the overall environment. Naess (2008), “discussed the historical background of the ecology movement and its connection to values respecting nature and the inherent worth of other beings” (p. 25). Non-human beings that live in water and on land have never been given equal values to humans. Instead, they are treated as commodities to be exploited. This mindset has been in practice since antiquity, but it has been rising significantly since the influence of industrial capitalism. Humans have violently attacked nature and inhabiting the earth. In an ecosystem, both living and non-living beings make equal contributions to the whole. The relationship between humans and other animals is not directly visible: “The ecosystem concept is used to describe abstract structures” (Naess, p. 78). The relationships between humans and other features or between flora and fauna are abstract structures. These abstract structures represent the interconnectedness of all living as well as non-living beings on Earth.

The preservation of nature is a must for sustainable ecology, not only for the “future generations of humans” but also for the “future generations of living beings,” (Naess, p. 99). Modern humans are obsessively self-centered, overlooking the value of other beings on this planet. If he thinks at all, he thinks only of the future of human generations. Nayar (2010) asserted that “both human and non-human life forms have intrinsic values” (p. 246). The intrinsic values of human and nonhuman life forms are interconnected. The realization of interconnectedness is necessary for the balanced existence of all forms of this ecosphere. Despite humans’ awareness of the ecological crisis, they prioritize humans over non-human organisms and the natural world. Diehm (2002) suggests that while encountering other living beings, there should be “a way of recognizing and assuming responsibility, of being responsive” (p. 34). It is a blunder of humans to neglect the values of other beings.

3. Methods and Materials

This research is qualitative research. The proposed method is based on a textual analysis and interpretation method. For its theoretical basis, it employs insights from ecocriticism, focusing mainly on ecofeminism since it opposes the androcentric mindset. Ecofeminism as a theory blurs the value hierarchies between man and woman and between man and nature by sharply criticizing anthropocentric and androcentric viewpoints. Emerged from ecocriticism and feminism, it takes nature as a living being equating it to a nurturing mother. However, going beyond the essentialist viewpoint of women as caregivers and child bearers, it challenges "the dualisms of patriarchal thought, which associate men/reason/culture and define them in opposition to women/emotion/nature (Gaard, 1998, p. 20). Ecofeminism sees the condition of both nature and women as the same in the hands of men and advocates for their resistance against all kinds of suppression and exploitation.

4. Results and Discussion

Oates's "The Buck" is a wonderful story that makes a sharp attack on the ferocious thirst of humans, which operates adversely in the deterioration of the entire ecosphere. The hunting activity is not limited to the killing of one targeted animal; rather, it simultaneously affects the lives of many other untargeted creatures that live together in the same physical environment. Implicit destruction can be more dangerous than explicit destruction. It leads to geological changes and ecological disturbances.

In the story "The Buck," the hunter explicitly goes after the hunting of the wild life. After several attempts and hard work, he successfully spotted a buck. With care, he tries to throw his arrow straight into the buck's neck, but he cannot finish it outright. The buck is wounded and attempts to run away. Snyder, an old lady of 82 years, knows about the incident and tries to save the buck, but all her attempts go in vain. Accidentally, the injured buck knocks the lady down, hurting her badly. Their bodies lose blood freely until they empty their bodies. On the other hand, the hunter, unsympathetically but excitedly, takes pride in striking down the buck: "the buck leaps, the arrow has struck him in the neck, there's the shriek of animal terror and pain and Woddy Kunz shouts in ecstatic triumph" (p. 133). This is the sharp contrast between the animal fighting death in terror and panic and the hunter happily happy with his deeds. He is celebrating his egotistical victory over the unarmed innocent buck.

After seeing the ugly sight, the old lady hurries toward the buck with a view of saving it from the hunter who is still following him. Oates illustrates the scene as follows:

The buck is snorting, stamping his sharp hooved feet in the snow. Deranged by terror and panic, he thrashes his antlered head from side to side,

bleeding freely, bright-glistening blood underfoot splattered onto Melanie Snyder's clothes as instinctively and recklessly, she positions herself between the wounded animal and the hunter (p. 136).

The wounded buck, still horrified, is desperately trying to stand on its feet. It is bleeding freely. Snyder rushes in quickly and takes a position between the injured animal and the hunter.

Snyder shouts to the hunter to leave her land immediately and let the animal be left alone. She exclaimed, "get off my land!" Have you done enough evil? This is a poor creature! Let him alone" (p. 133). The hunter who knows he has trespassed on her land but pretends not to know it. Instead, he tried intimidating her. He claims the buck is his property. He shouts, threatening not to obstruct his strike: "That's my arrow, for Christ's sake, lady!" That buck's a gor, and he's mine!" (p. 134). But the lady is not scared at all. She boldly claims the buck because it inhabits her land, and none can trespass there without her permission, let alone hunting. She shouts at him: "Brute!" Murderer! I'm telling you to get off my land or I will call the sheriff and have you arrested!" (p. 134). Although the hunter repeatedly threatens her, he finally realizes his defeat and leaves the place without further debate.

The lady is shocked to see the pathetic situation that the buck is currently undergoing: "Like that arrow, I never saw—fifteen-inch, steel-tipped, razor-sharp—that penetrated the deer's neck, and killed him, though not immediately. How many hours, I wonder, till he bled to death, till his body turned cold and grew heavier" (p. 131). She observes all the painful activities the buck performs. The buck has lost its life because of the thirst of a ferocious human. On the other hand, the lady too loses her life for the sake of the buck. The deaths of both the buck and the lady symbolize the death of biodiversity and ecology as a whole.

Unlike ancient times, when humans hunted for survival, humans now hunt as a test of adventure and patience. Killing a buck is less for its meat than for gratifying his adventure, where he takes pride after the exact strikes and shots. Kunz feels "ecstatic triumph" after the strike marks an adventure. Salleh contends that "the Eurocentric capitalist patriarchal culture built on the domination of Nature" (p. 48) has brought ecological crisis. Kunz's androcentric capitalistic mentality is instrumental in wildlife destruction. His celebration of his strike was a symptom to that end.

There are several ways of hunting: by gun, by bow and arrow, by trap, and so on. Snyder hates all kinds of hunting. But to see the buck's present condition, she hates "the idea of hunting with bow and arrow—as if it made any difference to a deer, how it died" (p. 132) because it has given the buck much pain. She admits it is worse than the killing by gun since "With guns, you can at least hear the enemy" (p. 132) and take a safe position. Ecologists support, as Naess states, "the

inherent value of all beings and diversity” (p. 3). Snyder, as a woman of ecological sensibilities internalizes the agonies and pains the buck is experiencing.

Snyder is a great lover of the white-tailed buck. Coincidentally, the wounded deer have a white tail. White-tailed deer are considered highly fertile. Snyder discloses that the very high breeding capacity of the white-tailed deer has been an “excuse” for conservationists (who are predominantly males) to control “their alarmingly fertile numbers” (p. 132). She hates their actions of controlling the overbreeding of white-tailed deer, which, according to her accusation, damages crops and causes auto accidents: “White-tailed deer overbreeding, causing crop damage, auto accidents” (p. 135). Protection from buck crop damage is not a significant issue for humans. This can be achieved by constructing fences. However, killing them is a big issue. Snyder poignantly emphasized that killing animals is killing a human: “killing an animal is just a substitute for killing another human being. Male, female. That’s the forbidden fantasy” (p. 135). Here, Oates’s ecofeminist consciousness emerges. Naess opines that ecologists “seek ways to live less violently in *all* their relations” (p. 27), and Oates shows alternative ways to hunting. If hunters kill animals, they also kill human beings simultaneously.

Snyder does not leave a stone unturned to bring the buck back to life. She attempts to remove the arrow from the buck’s neck but cannot. She prays to God for the buck’s sake. Oates notes, “the old woman is trying clumsily to pull the arrow out of the buck’s neck, but she cannot do it. She prays with a god for the life of the buck, ‘—oh, please, you must not die, please’” (p. 137). The wounded buck cannot now move. Snyder does not want to see the buck die, but it is beyond her control. Oates notes, “The dying animal! —beautiful even in dying, bleeding to death, soaking Melanie Snyder’s clothes with his blood, and isn’t she bleeding too, from wounds in her throat and face? —her hands?” (p. 139). The arrow deeply penetrated the buck’s neck and severely injured the animal. Not only the buck, but the old woman is bleeding from the attack of the buck’s antlers while it tries to scramble: “antlers strike her in the chest, she’s falling, crying out of surprise” (p. 137). Snyder is bleeding both physically and mentally. Her mind bleeds along with the buck’s pain and agonies.

The buck finally dies. Oates mentions, “he’s dead, she feels the life pass from him, ‘Oh no, ho no,’ sobbing and pushing at the body, warm sticky blood by degrees cooling and congealing (p. 139). The buck is dead, and the woman can do nothing more. She confirmed that the buck’s body had not bled. Its blood is congealing. The whole body is becoming cold. The woman is completely shocked. There is no difference between the death of a family member and that of an animal. Snyder exposes an integral relationship with the buck, which cannot and should not be ignored.

Finally, Snyder also dies from the injuries caused by the buck’s antlers. Interestingly, she dies during her attempts to save the buck, and thus, her body remains locked with the body of the buck. Oates visualizes, “an astonishing sight: human and animal bodies virtually locked together in the rigor of death, their mingled blood so soaked into Melanie Snyder’s clothes, so frozen, it possible to separate them only force” (p.140). This lock highlights the interconnectedness between humans and animals.

Naess argues, “as a general goal, the ecofeminism movement participates in overcoming the ecological crisis” (p.103). “The Buck,” as an ecofeminist story, focuses on the prevention of ecological crises to ensure sustainable ecology and the environment. It highlights that the existing androcentric mentality must be altered on time, and nature’s rights and values must be recognized and addressed. Vandana Shiva (2014) stated, “We are part of nature, not her master and owner... we should recognize the rights of Mother Earth, therefore, the intrinsic value of her species and living processes” (p. xx). Intrinsic values inherent inseparably in all living and nonliving organisms must be recognized. For this reason, concerted efforts by all human beings are urgent. The sustainable balance between man and nature will never be possible until the people of this universe think from this point of view.

Ecocriticism is a critical approach that studies how literature deals with ecology. The study analyzes the relationship between human beings and the natural world, focusing on the development of sustainable ecology. Z. Kaur and S. Kaur (2014, 2015) stated that “ecocriticism tries to explore the relationship of literature with the natural world and further it examines the role that natural surroundings and environment play in the minds of the creative writers during their imagination and creative process” (p. 28). Literature and the natural world have integral relations because the natural surroundings and environment play a vital role in composing a piece of literature. The sight, sound, and scent of natural vegetation, birds, and animals help generate new ideas in the authors’ minds. From the sight of snowy woods, Robert Frost (2006) wrote a poem. His last stanzas are catchy, touchy, and highly philosophical: “The Woods are lovely dark and deep/But I have promises to keep” (lines 13-14). The sight impresses him, but he must go ahead and keep his promise. Whereas Frost composes from beautiful sight, Oates creates from ugly sight.

The contemporary human world is guided by both capitalistic and consumerist mentalities. This mentality has, either intentionally or unintentionally, dominated the entire nonhuman world. There are an insignificant number of people who sincerely respect and value non-human beings. As, “One naturalist refused to kill a weasel who was socked into his hand deeply as a rattlesnake” (Dillard, 1999, p. 5). There is a kind of friendship between humans and wild animals or water

animals. Animals rarely have ill-intentions in their friendships, but humans have ill intentions as such. The weasel knows that a man is his natural friend, but only a few men think from that angle.

To uphold a sustainable ecology, "non-human life must flourish even if this reduces human affluence or human population" (Katz, 2001, p. 158). The flourishing of nonhuman life can reduce human well-being, and it might be accountable for some time, but its long-term benefits cannot be ignored. Thus, "humans need to do more than merely preserve the natural environment" (Katz, p. 165). However, only conserving and preserving may not be sufficient. They have to think alternatively about how sustainable ecological amendment is possible. In the story, "The Buck", Oates advocates for the conservation of deer. Katz might be willing to say that humans have to find alternative ways to increase the number of plants and wildlife.

Humans destroy nonhuman lives for different purposes. Hunting is mostly done for meat, but it is also done for other purposes. For example, Heinrich (2014) reveals, "Russell and McGowan also found evidence that vultures may have been hunted for their feathers for presumably a much different costume worn as well for a ceremonial purpose" (n. p). The peacock is hunted for both feathers and meat. Humans go hunting for various purposes, including adventure and pleasure. Whatever the purpose, it is highly telling to understand that it is harmful in the natural world.

Man has destroyed the habitats of wildlife. He does not think "much about 'homes' for other animals" (Heinrich, 2014). In the story "The Buck," the hunter shoots the deer that are encroaching into the Buck's home. This is too inhumane. Therefore, this study focuses on the prevention of animal destruction. The destruction of one species subsequently affects the entire ecological environment. It is necessary to control the ecological crisis. Lynch et al. (2012) put forth their view: "The idea is not simply to minimize harm to the environment, not simply to be able to sustain the current circumstances, but to find ways of living that repair the environmental harm caused by previous behavior" (p. 6). Repairing the environmental harm caused by the previous behaviors of humans and finding ways of living with minimum energy consumption is a must. Although any change that takes place is irreversible, Jansman (2021) proposes applying restoration ecology. According to him, "Restoration ecology is the practice of restoring the species, landscapes and ecosystems that occupied a site at some point in the past, but were damaged or destroyed" (p. 34). Is it possible? Yes, it is possible, only when humans think of alternative ways like becoming vegetarians to prevent hunting and killing wild animals and using inductive stoves to minimize the amount of firewood for cooking. People like Kunz would not shoot bucks with arrows if they were vegetarians.

5. Conclusion

The main objective of this study was to explore how the story "The Buck" reflects the need for sustainable ecology through the presentation of two antithetical viewpoints of humans regarding animal hunting. By applying insights from ecofeminism, an upshoot of ecocriticism and feminism, this study discusses how humans measure the value of things, animals, and plants in favor of their benefits. Regardless of the activities humans engage in, these often turn into disturbing factors that lead to the deterioration of flora and fauna. The self-focused presence of humans in nature has severely threatened all living and non-living forms. This has been pervasively happening recently.

In the story, the male character's ferocious thirst for the buck not only kills the buck but also the female character Snyder Malaine. On the one hand, the hunter has badly neglected animal rights; on the other hand, he has neglected the woman's rights. This is a hunter who has used a double-edged sword to victimize women and buck them, who lose their lives. Uncontrolled hunting results in a decline in wildlife. While hunting, a targeted animal destroys several small plants and creatures. How many small plants and creatures were destroyed by the wounded buck? Is there only one animal loss? The injured animal ruined several small plants and animals while running wildly because of the deadly pain of an arrow. Despite the heedless activities of humans against animals, there are some positive moves taken by animal rightists like Snyder who vehemently oppose hunting.

The study has analyzed that in "The Buck," the author emphasizes maintaining human and animal relations intact through the portrayal of the diametrically opposing views of two characters, namely Kunz, the hunter, and Snyder, the ecologically conscientious lady. The hunter shoots the buck that the lady tries to save. However, ultimately, both the animal and the woman lose their lives locked together in the same place. This is highly telling that both ecologically aware humans and innocent animals die together in the hands of selfish hunters who triumph over shooting animals. Togetherness symbolizes an inseparably integral relationship between humans and animals. Conserving any part of nature like the buck, means conserving the entire ecosystem or ecosphere. Therefore, the death of the buck symbolizes the degradation of ecology and the environment. Because of ecological degradation, various unprecedented events have occurred, such as global warming, ozone layer depletion, climate change, and unexpected pandemics. They pose serious threats to the loss of different species of living and non-living forms. Therefore, this study concludes that since humans are responsible for all these consequences, they should be responsible for preventing further dangers. This study will be useful in the field of ecofeminism, which seeks to end all kinds of exploitation of women and animals.

6. Limitations and Further Study

This study is limited to an ecofeminist investigation of Carol Joyce Oates's short story "The Buck." Further research can be conducted to examine it from other perspectives such as Animal Studies.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, R.K.G.; methodology, T.N.U.; formal analysis, T.N.U.; resources, T.N.U. and R.K.G.; data curation, T.N.U. and R.K.G.; writing—original draft preparation, all authors contributed equally; writing—review and editing, T.N.U. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Data Availability Statement

The original data presented in the study are openly available in relevant books, articles, and websites.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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