

VOICES OF NATURE AND WOMEN : AN ECOCRITICAL AND ECOFEMINIST ANALYSIS OF CHARLOTTE MCCONAGHY'S NOVELS

ATHIRA K.J.¹ and SAYANA K.S.¹

1. Department of English,
St Joseph's College (Autonomous), Irinjalakuda, Thrissur, Kerala, India

ABSTRACT

Nature in literature refers to the portrayal and exploration of the natural world in written works. This can include description of landscapes, flora, fauna, and natural phenomena, as well as the portrayal of human interactions with the environment. The term Eco-criticism is obviously used for the observation and learning the relationship between the literature and the environment. Human beings interact with various aspects of the nature and so their lives are indistinguishably bound with non-human beings and other fellow human beings. Ecofeminism is a philosophy and movement born from the belief that the patriarchal systems of domination and oppression of women are directly connected to the systems of domination and destruction of the environment. Man has always considered both women and nature to be silent, passive objects. And therefore, he used both to serve his selfish interests. Charlotte McConaghy's *Once There Were Wolves* and *Migrations* focus on how human beings connect with Nature, the damage caused to the environment and the deep relations between women, animals and the natural world. Both the novels combine feminist and ecological ideas, critiquing exploitation and encouraging compassion toward nature and each other.

Keywords: Nature, eco-criticism, environment, ecofeminism, women

INTRODUCTION

The modern ecological devastation has given rise to literature that not only critiques environmental destruction but also seeks to discover its

connection with the systems of oppression. Charlotte McConaghy a contemporary Australian author has created a genre in this stream of thought through her emotionally appealing novels, such as *Migrations* (2020) and *Once There Were Wolves* (2021). Her works roots into the intertwined fates of woman and the natural world, focusing on themes of loss, survival and redemption. By using ecocritical and ecofeminist contexts, McConaghy's novels focus the voices of the nature and women, showcasing the vulnerabilities they face under the same exploitive systems. This paper aims to cross check how McConaghy's works corresponds with the theories of ecocriticism and ecofeminism, offering an assessment of society's impact on the environment and the marginalization of women.

Ecocriticism is a literary theory that examines the relationship between literature and the nature. The proponents of ecocriticism are Cheryll Glotfelty and Lawrence Buel, a prominent figure who describes ecocriticism as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. It challenges anthropocentrism, that believes humans are the center of existence and demands for biocentrism which accepts the need of all living beings. In McConaghy's novels, ecocriticism becomes and intense tool for analyzing the depiction of delicateness of ecosystems, the effect of human activity on biodiversity and the urgent need for conserving environment.

Ecofeminism is a philosophy and movement that connects the oppression of women with the exploitation of nature, believing that both

are deep-rooted in the patriarchal system of domination. Ecofeminism states that just as patriarchal systems exploit women, they also loot the natural resources of earth and leads to environmental degradation and social inequalities. In McConaghy's novels she uses ecofeminism as a lens that reflects the experiences of her female protagonists, who are very much connected to the natural worlds and often fights the patriarchal structures. Her works mirrors how the exploitation of women reflects the exploitation of nature.

Ecocriticism and ecofeminism, both the terminologies are intertwined in their concerns for critiquing the exploitative systems and their claim for a more harmonious coexistence between humans and the natural world.

VOICES OF WOMEN AND NATURE: AN ECOCRITICAL ANALYSIS

In McConaghy's works, nature is an important and active presence that outlines the work. Attributing human touch to the natural world aligns with the focus of eco criticism on natural force. In *Migrations*, the Artic terns are the central tenants of the story, symbolizing resilience and loss. Their migratory Journey , which is considered as the longest in the world, reflects Franny Stone's quest for redemption and belonging. The terns' crisis also highlights the destructive effect of human activities on biodiversity and ecosystems. The extinction of Artic terns represents the extensive crisis of deteriorating ecosystems caused by climate change and industrialization. The devastation of the natural world counterparts Franny's personal sorrow and dislocation. As her quest continues in search for terns, her connection with the natural world becomes a source of comfort and self-discovery. Birds in the novel represents the freedom, survival and the vulnerability of life. The declining population of the Artic terns becomes a touching symbol of worlds declining biodiversity.

In *Once There Were Wolves*, the reintroduced Wolves serves as a figure for both ecological revival and the central character's internal healing. The Wolves represents beauty of nature and power and misunderstandings about predators. The novel examines the tender balance of ecosystems, expressing how the reintroduction of predators can revive the ecological harmony. The Wolves represents Inti Flynn's inner struggles of emotions, trauma and her urge to heal herself and the world around her. The uneasiness between the local community and the Wolves signifies the conflict between humanity and nature. Wolves also symbolizes for both fear and restoration. The misunderstandings about the predators emphasizes the humanity's habit to criticize what they do not actually understand about the predators and marginalized groups.

Both the novels highlight role of humanity in environmental degradation. McConaghy evaluates the practices that degenerates the ecology crossing the limits, asking the readers to reconsider their practices that impact on the planet. Her novels serve as a warning of climate change and protecting endangered species. Another theme which can be noticed in her work is the critique of anthropocentrism. By examining the migrations of the birds or the role of Wolves, she addresses a world which is centered by humans which gives importance to economic growth over sustaining ecology. McConaghy wants her readers to rethink about their place within nature focusing on coexistence rather than domination.

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Through her novels McConaghy explores the portrayal of women and their experiences and connection with the nature through an ecofeminist perspective. In *Migrations*, Franny's connection with the terns mirrors the interconnectedness over domination. Her need to protect the terns reflects an assessment of exploiting nature of the environment by humanity. Franny also challenges the gender stereotyping by ignoring, traveling alone often at her own cost of personal relationships. Franny's troubled relationships with her family and husband mirrors her hardships to resolve her individual desires with the expectations of the society. From her connection with the terns, she is finding solace from the conflicts – symbolic representation of ecofeminist ideals. Artic terns can also be the representation of resilience and survival against all odds, while her journey mirrors her desire to protect what remains.

Inti Flynn is a biologist who works to reintroduce the wolves to Scottish Highlands. Her connection with the past mirrors her efforts to resolve with her past trauma and violence she had endured. The wolves are the symbol of vulnerability as well as her strength. As a woman in a male dominated field, Inti receives resistance from local community which is an example for marginalization of women. Her commitment towards the environment and wolves questions the control and exploitation over coexistence. Her efforts for rewilding suggest her belief in possibility of reviving harmony between humans and nature. McConaghy questions the traditional stereotypes of woman who were weak and submissive once, presenting them as symbols of strength and resilience.

Ecofeminism suggests that the exploitation of nature and oppression of women are all related. In both novels McConaghy questions the exploitation of natural resources and suppression of woman. The destructions done to the natural resources or ecosystem can be paralleled to the physical and emotional harm that are being inflicted upon women. Her female characters render a sense of empathy for nature which roots out from their own experiences. The solidarity between women and nature are the recurring themes central to ecofeminist thought.

CONCLUSION

McConaghy's novels illustrates the power of narration that calls for urgent concerns towards ecology and feminism. She gave voice to the silent entities including endangered species and oppressed women asking for a deeper understanding between women and nature. She critiques the system of power that continue leads to exploitation and ecological destruction. She portrays women as representatives of change, highlighting their role in environment sustainability and transformation. Her novels remind us the voices of women and nature. In a world fighting with climate change, loss of biodiversity and gender inequality, her novels are both a warning and calls for united action.

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