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Impression of Ethics on Ecofeminism: Eliminating Dichotomies in *Bird Cottage* by Eva Meijer

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Abstract

In *Bird Cottage* by Eva Meijer, the main character blurs the dualistic dichotomies between humans and animals by applying ethical practices, morality, and emotion. Ecofeminists stand against the Western reason/emotion dichotomy, and they mutilate human/animal dichotomies by cherishing ethics and morality. In literature and environmental concerns the traces of Ethics and Ecofeminism should be followed. Hence, in this article, by referring to theoreticians like Carolyn Merchant, Gwen Hunnicutt, Lori Gruen, and other eminent critics, *Bird Cottage* by Eva Meijer is analyzed through an ethical-ecofeminist perspective, not only to show the influence of ethics on deforming dualisms between humans and nonhumans, which is a purpose of ecofeminism, but also to show the social influence of dualistic and non-dualistic relations on humans by following and not following ethics. Considering ecofeminism and its scope in this analysis, it is concluded that Meijer in *Bird Cottage* emphasizes utilizing ethics and environmental justice in seeking non-dualistic coexistence with nonhumans and, in the interim, she deforms Western human/animal dualism by referring to Len's attitude and her actions toward wild birds.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Ethics, Dualisms, Ethical-Ecofeminist Perspective, *Bird Cottage* by Eva Meijer

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1. Introduction

Ecofeminism and ethics have recommended some solutions to both social and environmental issues. In recent decades, the connection between humans and nonhuman animals has been profoundly influenced by human supremacy and the exploitation of animals and nature for human benefit. These factors (human supremacy and exploitation of animals) have contributed to an unethical relationship between humans and nonhumans. So, revisiting ethical principles and applying them to human-animal relationships can help foster a non-dualistic companionship between the two. The Western division between reason and emotion has also sparked debate, particularly regarding nonhuman animals and nature. This divide has reinforced human-animal dualisms, further separating humans from nonhuman animals and the natural world. However, an ethical perspective is essential not only toward other humans but also toward nonhuman animals and nature.

In *Respect for Nature* (2011), Paul W. Taylor explores the "Structural Symmetry between Human Ethics and Environmental Ethics" (41). He argues that, akin to Singer's perspective, all humans are individuals of comparable moral worth, despite variations in characteristics or differing "traits of personhood," such as the ability to speak (41). Regardless of individual differences, a foundational belief in equality exists, accompanied by a necessity for mutual respect and adherence to societal rules and standards (42). Moreover, environmental ethics advocates for "a belief system, an ultimate moral attitude, and a set of moral rules and standards" that extend to nonhuman animals and nature (44). These rules provide a concrete expression of moral attitudes and behaviors in practical life (44).

Taylor promotes a biocentric perspective, which encourages individuals to identify themselves as members of "the Earth's Community of Life" (44). This outlook challenges the notion of human superiority over other living beings and upholds "the principle of species impartiality" (45), affirming that all humans and nonhumans possess equal inherent worth (71). The discussions surrounding biology, moral philosophy, and environmental science further elucidate the inherent equality of all beings, leading to the deformation of the human/animal dichotomy. Respect for nature embodies "the ultimate attitude of the biocentric outlook" (90). Moral rights for plants and animals are established through logical reasoning (245). In his discourse

on animal rights, Taylor advocates for recognizing legal rights for nonhumans, suggesting that animals and plants should be seen as "bearers of legal rights," which entails securing their most fundamental interests, such as life and liberty (220, 224).

In line with Taylor's assertions, numerous ecofeminists and critics aim to eradicate the dualisms between humans and animals while promoting an ethical approach toward nonhuman entities and nature. This article aims to analyze the impact of ethics on human-animal relations by examining *Bird Cottage* by Eva Meijer through ethical-ecofeminist lens. Additionally, it will explore the dualistic and non-dualistic aspects of human-animal social relations, providing readers with a deeper understanding of the ethical non-dualistic companionship of humans with nonhuman animals and nature through analyzing the actions and attitude of main character throughout the plot.

2. Objectives of the Study

This study examines the relationship between ethics and ecofeminism, and the influence of ethics on ecofeminism in eliminating dichotomies in *Bird Cottage* by Eva Meijer. Moreover, it seeks to see whether ethics and ecofeminism impact human-animal connection between Len (the main character) and birds so that the prejudice and discrimination over ecosystem and nonhuman animals may be averted and both factors may distort dualisms between humans and nonhumans in the novel. Additionally, it explores in what respects Eva Meijer's *Bird Cottage* relates ethics, ecofeminist issues, and animal rights towards deforming Western dualisms. Finally, it examines whether the novel succeeds in supplying the readers with a moment of concern to redefine their relations to nature and nonhuman animals.

3. Significance of the Study

This interdisciplinary study sheds light on both the interwoven connection of ethics and ecofeminism regarding providing equality for different classes, and the significance of averting the subjugation of women, nature and nonhuman animals. Considering the main and mutual concerns of ethics and ecofeminism, this study, which acts as a tool for subjugated voices and for social changes rethinking in related issues, challenges the dominant prejudicial culture and behavior towards women and

nature considered as second classes of importance. In addition to all the significance mentioned, this research provides the readers with some moment of reconsideration and deep understanding of their non-dualistic relation with nature.

4. Literature Review

Bird Cottage, written by Eva Meijer, has garnered significant attention from researchers, critics, and scholars, including Tague, who suggests that one of the central themes of the novel is an implicit question about what defines a person (Tague, 2022: 317). He identifies two key aspects of *Bird Cottage*: first, the contrasting dualistic realms—"inside/outside; human/animal; music/silence"—that the novel seeks to reconcile (317). Second, Meijer's advocacy for Len's lifestyle and her acknowledgment of other species, particularly birds, emphasizes that "friendship is more important than experimentation with birds" (317). Tague critiques humanity's supremacy over nature, noting that Meijer's writing illuminates the spaces between humans and other beings that can be both analyzed and shared.

Similarly, Rijk refers to the style of writing in *Bird Cottage* and the use of anthropomorphism and imagery throughout the plot which not only indicates the significance of eradicating distance between humans and animals, but also gives individuality to nonhumans like birds. Rijk criticizes the lack of individuality of animals and the distance between humans and animals in real life. Although, Rijk refers to domestication in the novel, in this article the domestication is not used as an essential word for describing Len's relation with birds; in this article, the aim is to depict a non-dualistic type of coexistence by which Len practices to respect birds' rights and individuality through making a friendship.

Moreover, Antoinette Fawcett, the translator of *Bird Cottage*, asserts her opinions on translating the novel. She declares that Meijer's background interested her in writing this biographical novel about Len Howard. According to Fawcett, *Bid Cottage* "raises philosophical, ethical, and scientific questions about animal, specifically avian, communication and consciousness" (Fawcett, 2018). Analyzing the language of the novel, she expresses how by using initial capital letters for birds' names Meijer follows Howard's pattern of "respect and reverence" for birds' individuality even in writing (Fawcett, 2018).

Furthermore, not only *Bird Cottage*, but also other works of Meijer are analyzed and apparently have similar ecological concerns in their texts. For instance, Barbara Fraipont in an analysis of the novel *De nieuwe rivier (The New River)* by Eva Meijer declares that the text "deals with the tension between nature and culture, between human and animal, and urgently questions the limits of the human" (Fraipont, 2023) which can also be applicable to *Bird Cottage*. The ethical and animal-loving mindset of the author is reflected in most of her works including *Bird Cottage*. She also refers to *Bird Cottage* and argues that Len regards birds as full-fledged companions and communicates with them which is a type of "Eco-intrige" that animals and nature take center stage (Fraipont, 2023, 171).

Likewise, Crist analyses Len Howard's communication with birds in real life who is the Main Character of *Bird Cottage* by Eva Meijer. Crist views Howard's consideration of birds' individuality through "Martin Buber's lens of the reciprocity of I-and-Thou" (Crist, 2006: 179) which is "a reciprocal relationship" (186) in which Len tackles the borders between "outside and inside her home" and shapes an "uncommon human-bird interaction" (181). Accordingly, the distance between humans and animals is due to the "absence of attention, interest, or care" which leads to behaviors and actions including "caging" and "killing" animals or their "habitat destruction" (187). The I-It connection is "actively eschewed" (188) in Len's relation with birds and it is transformed to I-Thou reciprocal connection by her ethical care in dealing with birds.

In addition, as a nature activist and researcher, Meijer also has critical assertions about the human-animal non-dualistic coexistence. For instance, in *When Animals Speak* (2019), Meijer questions the degradation of animals' individuality. The unjust influence of humans' decisions on animal life is declared through an economic-political aspect (Meijer, 2019: 112). Besides, in "Learning Hope in the Anthropocene" (2022), the capitalist culture is condemned for the exploitation of nonhuman animals and nature. The animality of humans is acknowledged and it is argued that "all animals, human and nonhuman, are entangled in relations with others, in which they are mutually dependent on each other" (152). She exemplifies "the work of the Dutch Party for the Animals" which provided predominant significance to the "wellbeing of the earth and all its inhabitants"; this program demonstrated

that "a different way of doing politics, based on care and responsibility instead of economic growth, is possible" (145).

Furthermore, in "Global injustice and animals" (2023) it is argued that eradication of dualism between humans and animals would be practical through providing a more sustainable society in which animals individuality and "agency" should be acknowledged (498). Also, in "Speaking with Animals" (2016) Meijer refers to the language and culture of animals in their own way that requires humans to avert thinking about them. Referencing to posthuman culture, she asserts the difference between humans and animals is "a difference of degree, not kind" (Meijer, 2016: 74). She refers to *Bird Cottage* and Len Howard's real experience of "new form of language" that is formed "between communicative beings of different species" (83).

To sum up, the literature review reveals that while critics have addressed key concerns such as environmental justice, the human-animal non-dualistic relationship, and the eradication of dualisms through an animal-activism approach, these concepts have not yet been analyzed from an ethical-ecofeminist interdisciplinary perspective in analysis of *Bird Cottage* by Eva Meijer.

5. Theoretical Framework and Method

Merchant, Hunnicutt, and Gruen exemplify ecofeminists who are deeply concerned with ethical and moral issues, particularly in relation to nonhuman animals and the environment. Like most ecofeminists, they advocate for ethical practices and highlight the importance of care ethics in mutilating dualisms between humans and nonhumans. This study refers to their assumptions and theoretical thinking during the analysis.

Ecofeminism posits that the Earth is the foundational home for all creatures, both human and nonhuman. As Merchant notes, "Energy flows in and out" (Merchant, 1981: 10). Thus, threats to the Earth must be mitigated while fostering conditions that enhance positive energy. To preserve the biosphere, the application of care ethics is essential. By recognizing the Earth as our primary home, humans have the capacity to create an environment that respects the dynamic processes of life, valuing both human and animal existence. As Merchant articulates, "energy is changed and

exchanged in its continual flow through the interconnected parts," contributing to the communication between humans and nature (11).

In pursuing care ethics and morality towards nature and nonhuman animals, it is essential for humans to avoid a stance that excludes these entities. Critics such as John Ray and William Derham advocate a utilitarian perspective, positing that humans should manage nature for their own benefit. Similarly, some thinkers, including Marx, have adhered to a homocentric viewpoint. However, this utilitarian and homocentric ethics, which positions humans at the center of concern, are inadequate for dismantling the dichotomies present in the human/nonhuman animal relationship (Merchant, 2005: 73). A homocentric ethic underpins "the social interest model of politics" and informs the policies of "environmental regulatory agencies" focused primarily on human health (72).

Instead, a model of care ethics is needed to alleviate human disruption and supremacy, one that embraces empathy and moral responsibility toward both nature and nonhuman animals. Merchant advocates for "partnership ethics," which extends beyond merely human-human relationships to include human-nature interactions (2000: 7). This ethics suggests that the greatest good for both human and nonhuman communities lies in their mutual interdependence (Merchant, 2005: 83). It is rooted in the concept of relationality and encompasses:

- Fairness between communities of human animals and nonhuman animals
- Moral and ethical attention to both humans and nonhuman species
- Appreciation of both cultural variety and biodiversity
- Rejection of excluding women, minor and inferior groups, nature and nonhuman animals from ethics and ethical responsibility
- An ecological management and its consistency with permanent safety of both human and nonhuman communities (Merchant, 2005: 84)

Merchant's ethics of partnership emphasizes the interconnectedness of women, nonhuman animals, and nature, challenging existing dichotomies and hierarchies to foster equality among communities through morality and empathy. This framework promotes both "environmental well-being and social justice" through ethical decision-making (Merchant, 2005: 87).

Moreover, Hunnicutt commends this moral and "egalitarian" perspective

for opposing hierarchical thinking and fostering "communal communities" where diversity is not only respected but where humans, nonhuman animals, and nature are viewed as "interdependent" (Hunnicutt, 2020: 45). The rise of male dominance alongside civilization and modernization has intensified hierarchical frameworks, overshadowing egalitarian values.

Hunnicutt addresses the critical issue of climate change and underscores the responsibility of individuals to mitigate natural exploitation. She notes that while "attitudes and behaviors" are significant, they must be accompanied by necessary "political and structural changes" to combat both environmental degradation and the oppression of women (Hunnicutt, 2020: 79). She further explores the relationships between gender violence, "climate change, and trans-species harm" (81). The dominance of masculine control over nature, nonhuman animals, and the biosphere has exacerbated climate crises, exemplified by phenomena such as "deforestation" and "drought" (81). These issues demand a reevaluation of ethical frameworks. Care ethics, morality, a return to nature, and the cultivation of empathy towards all beings are crucial for dismantling social and environmental dualisms. Hunnicutt asserts the necessity of recognizing the ethical value of nonhuman animals and nature, emphasizing that the neglect of not following ethics must be addressed. By referring to James Nash's ideas that "there can be no social justice without ecological justice" and that "there can be no peace among nations in the absence of peace with nature", Hunnicutt adds that "there can be no ecological justice without species justice" and that "there can be no peace among humans in the absence of peace with nature (Hunnicutt 2020: 115-116). According to her, "climate justice and gender violence call us to understand interlocking issues of speciesism, racism, sexism, and economic injustice and other systems of inequality" (2020: 115-116).

In general, Hunnicutt emphasizes the importance of liberating nature and nonhuman animals, a process that simultaneously facilitates the liberation of marginalized individuals and reexamines the dualistic relationship between humans and animals. Her ecofeminist ideologies encompass an intrinsic ethical essence, advocating for care ethics and emotional respect for nature and nonhuman animals from an egalitarian perspective.

Furthermore, Lori Gruen, in *Ethics and Animals* (2011), underscores the

necessity of recognizing animals and their ethical considerability (33, 25). The presence of animals is significant, as it helps to define humanity conceptually; the presumption that humans alone deserve ethical consideration must be challenged. Gruen critically analyzes human exceptionalism, illustrating that animals, like humans, possess the capacity for suffering. For example, certain conspecifics risk their lives for mates, while others may die from sorrow (5). Living alongside nonhuman animals cultivates empathy in humans, providing an opportunity to expand our understanding "of our own animality and our place" within the natural world (158).

To foster ethical interspecies relationships, Gruen proposes the concept of "Entangled Empathy" (2012: 214, 227). She defines ethical relations as involving an understanding and responsiveness to "another's needs, interests, desires, vulnerabilities, hopes" and perspectives, rather than imposing one's own interpretations (227). Empathy is essential for maintaining ethical relationships with nonhumans; entangled empathy entails a process in which individuals, "through a pre-cognitive empathetic reaction," first respond to the conditions of others (228). In entangled empathy, individuals metaphorically "put themselves into another's shoes" (228), learning to acknowledge both the similarities and differences between themselves and the nonhuman beings they empathize with (229).

The development of a moral practice termed "engaged empathy" serves as a method to enhance our understanding of humanity's position within both societal and environmental contexts (Gruen, 2011: 206). According to Gruen, this approach enables individuals to respond more effectively to the "ethical claims" and moral assertions made by others (206). For instance, Gruen's concept of "engaged empathy" facilitates an awareness of the "experiences of other animals," prompting a critical examination of the circumstances that jeopardize their welfare or possess the potential to promote their flourishing (206).

In analyzing *Bird Cottage* through an ethical-ecofeminist lens in this study, and drawing on the works of prominent critics such as Merchant, Hunnicutt, and Gruen, the roles of morality, care ethics, and emotion and their interconnection with ecological feminism are explored in distorting the dualisms of human/animal and culture/nature.

6. Research Questions

1. Critically analyzed, does main character Len in *Bird Cottage* advocate ethics and ecofeminism or is she against them?
2. In which respects is the novel of *Bird Cottage* by Eva Meijer influenced by ethics and ecological feminism? How does the plot support Len's ethical-ecofeminist influence on her human-animal relation with birds?
3. Does the novel succeed in warning readers mentally and emotionally to redefine their coexistence and connection to nature and to animals?

7. Discussion and Findings

7.1. Significance of Morality and Ethics in Dealing with Nonhuman Animals

Bird Cottage, written by Eva Meijer, serves as a bibliographic narrative of Len Howard, interlinked with fictional elements. It recounts her reciprocal relationship with wild birds, illustrating her profound commitment of time, energy, and life to their well-being. This dedication offers readers insights into the moral and ethical significance of nature and the lives of non-human animals, challenging traditional dualisms that separate humans from animals.

Known also as Gwendolen, Len relocates to a small cottage in Sussex in February 1938, where she spends the remainder of her life interacting with and studying the behavior of wild birds. The novel thus chronicles this companionship, eradicating hierarchical frameworks and dichotomies between human and non-human animals from moral and ethical perspectives. It serves as a literary example of ecofeminism, questioning the Western division between reason and emotion.

Throughout *Bird Cottage*, the narrative emphasizes the importance of moral and emotional connections to birds, advocating for an ethics of care rather than adhering to socially constructed rational norms. Len resists the pitfalls of Western philosophical thought that perpetuate binary oppositions between reason and emotion. At the outset of the story, after a worker demolishes a hedge, numerous birds are either injured or escape in panic. Len's response, particularly her decision to bury a dead sparrow, highlights her deep concern for the wild birds with whom she engages in non-dualistic communication. This moment poignantly illustrates her emotional investment in their lives, further underscoring the ethical themes woven throughout

the narrative:

> "At the corner I find a little one that has fallen from its nest. It's a Sparrow, newly fledged. I carefully lift up the little brown body, already knowing that things aren't right. The creature trembles and then goes totally still, stiller than any stillness that holds life. With my other hand I make a little hollow in the earth beneath the hedge, lay him gently down, then cover him up." (Meijer, 2018: 12-13)

Then, Len shares her experience of saving a crow she calls Charles. In her youth, she talks to him as if he is a dear friend. When she decides to move to London, she feels a deep sense of loss for Charles during her absence. Her emotional connection to birds is profound. Before leaving, she tells Charles about her plans: "Charles tilts his head" and watches her intently (Meijer, 2018: 43). She confesses to him that she will miss him dearly. Even as she joins an orchestra in London, Len's focus remains on the wild birds around her, shifting her primary concern to observing and understanding them better (Meijer, 2018: 75).

Furthermore, Len's passion for birds deepens during her time in London. When her mother visits, she brings Len a collection about birds containing "line drawings and advice on how to make our environs more welcoming for birds" (Meijer, 2018: 80). One day, a poignant incident occurs when Len encounters an injured pigeon in the street, struck by a cart. The bird's wing is broken, and its abdomen is severely torn. As Len holds the bird, she realizes it is still alive but in pain, peering at her with one eye. This moment is significant for Len, as she is faced with the difficult decision to end the bird's suffering. She ultimately chooses to pick up a brick and end the bird's suffering:

> "I must hurry, that poor creature, the Pigeon looks at me again when I return, sorry, I say, I'm terribly sorry, and I kneel down and slam the brick onto the Pigeon as hard as I can, smash the skull to pieces in a single blow, and I strike again although the Pigeon is already dead, the Pigeon is now truly dead… another Pigeon is watching some way off, its mate, probably, and I whisper sorry once again and then I walk on and people are still acting as if they haven't seen anything at all, though there really was something to see, and now I'm probably weeping but it's raining and so my tears can't be seen, and no one

looks closely enough anyway." (Meijer, 2018: 92-93)

Len breaks down in tears, overwhelmed by the emotional weight of her actions. She embodies a posthuman perspective where ethics and emotions extend to the welfare of nonhuman animals. Len has rescued numerous wild birds, including a magpie that she cared for over a week before releasing it (Meijer, 2018: 96). However, she feels powerless to help an injured pigeon on the street, ultimately believing that ending its suffering is the only compassionate option.

Moreover, Len strongly opposes the practice of conditioning birds in laboratories, viewing it as an immoral treatment of nonhuman animals. She firmly condemns the confinement of animals:

> "'I'm reading a book at the moment about how they condition Pigeons. Really nasty work.' I tell her about the way the Pigeons are trained, with food and electric shocks. 'You know what I think: that it's not only immoral to study birds in lab conditions, but it's also bad science. They behave differently then. The birds we had at home when I was young were much cleverer than this kind of research suggests.'" (Meijer, 2018: 129)

Nonhuman animals, such as birds, possess the right to live freely, as their behavior differs significantly from the conditions under which they are often confined in laboratories and cages. Research indicates that they exhibit a level of intelligence that surpasses common human perceptions. Len has published articles that elucidate the diverse behaviors exhibited by various wild birds in their natural habitats. Nevertheless, Len acknowledges that reason and scientific inquiry typically hold greater weight in societal discourse than ethical or moral considerations (Meijer, 2018: 132).

Len studies the attitudes of wild birds concurrently, making her work appear similar to an experiment, yet scientific inquiry is not her primary focus. Ethically, fostering a non-dualistic and reciprocal relationship with wild birds, as exemplified by her connection with Star, holds greater significance for Len and their "friendship" (Meijer, 2018: 152). However, the journal Nature has rejected her article on Great Tits, citing a lack of scientific evidence and replicable examples to support her findings. The core issue at hand is the prevailing assumption that scientific knowledge is infallible, while intuition and emotion are regarded as imprecise. Len's work advocates for

the notion that this may not always be the case, particularly in relation to nonhuman animals. Len understands that wild birds are individual creatures exhibiting diverse behaviors across different environments, and fundamentally, they possess the moral right to freedom:

> "Star would hate it. I've told him that dozens of times. She'd fly off and never return. I can't catch her and put her in a cage. All the trust I've built up with her would vanish in an instant. …You wouldn't put people in a cage, with no company, day after day or week after week, in a strange and sterile environment with shiny walls, smelling of bleach and unknown birds, and then test how intelligent they are. In fact, birds do pretty well in such experiments. It's a wonder they cooperate at all with the petty little tasks they're given, that they don't deliberately dash themselves against the bars, or sit in a corner, refusing to move." (Meijer, 2018: 220-221)

Len argues that confining wild birds in laboratories for study is both unjust and immoral, while simultaneously expecting them to demonstrate intelligence. Through this comparison, Len highlights the fact that wild birds possess intelligence and individuality akin to that of humans, underscoring the importance of morality and ethics in caring for wild birds and nonhuman animals. For her, values such as morality, emotion, ethics, and care take precedence over science and reason. Ultimately, Len places greater value on moral and ethical considerations regarding birds. In her final days, she bequeaths her wish for the bird cottage to be preserved as "a bird sanctuary" (Meijer, 2018: 244). These exemplified moments reinforce that her ethics of care and morality toward wild birds surpasses any scientific rationale.

Furthermore, as another instance, Len's respect and care for birds are so deeply ingrained that she refrains from discarding their fallen feathers. This commitment reflects her moral stance advocating for care ethics towards nonhuman animals, such as wild birds:

> "Hop follows him, tries to overtake him at the top window, veers sharply at the last moment so as not to fly against the pane. A few tiny feathers lie on the table. I pick them up and put them in the drawer, with the other feathers. It's a shame to throw them away." (Meijer, 2018: 178)

Generally, throughout the novel, the significance of morality and ethics

becomes evident, particularly through applying an ecofeminist analytic lens. Moving from practical analysis to theoretical references, the ideas mentioned above which are extracted from the novel can also be supported by numerous critics. For instance, Advocates for nonhuman animal rights support fostering "empathy with suffering" toward nonhuman beings (Weil, 1995: 314). They are vigilant in condemning the exploitation of nonhuman animals and nature as "unjust and immoral" acts (314). They challenge the dichotomies of "justice and compassion," "theory and feeling," as well as reason and emotion (314).

Also, Adams and Gruen promote care ethics and morality, asserting that these elements form the core of ecofeminist ethics (2022: 41). Such principles empower ecofeminists to address various issues faced by nonhuman animals and to tackle "ethical challenges" effectively (41). Plumwood similarly advocates for care ethics, denouncing anthropocentrism as a "hazard" to both nonhuman animals and the environment (2014: 444). When humans detach themselves from nonhuman animals and nature, they detach from empathy and care, resulting in an unethical approach. This detachment fosters a misguided understanding of their "character and location," leading to an "illusory sense of agency and autonomy" (444). While ethical concerns for nonhuman animals are emphasized and ethics is recognized as crucial for including marginalized voices, the reality of envisioning caged animals persists. Therefore, ethics serves as the foundation for reciprocal partnerships among humans and between human and nonhuman communities (Merchant, 2003: 388).

Moreover, the confinement of nonhuman animals in cages is explicitly critiqued within the framework of ecofeminism and ethics. Such captivity is not only immoral and unjust but also reinforces the presumption of human supremacy over nonhuman animals. Singer highlights the use of battery cages for hens, which confines them to such tight spaces that they are unable to move freely. These cages are condemned as immoral and unethical means of housing hens. Notably, the use of battery cages was rendered illegal on January 1, 2012 (Singer, 2016: 41). This practice exemplifies an unethical and dualistic relationship where humans exert dominance over nonhuman animals.

Furthermore, Gruen is a prominent critic of animal experimentation. She argues that such practices represent a "mistake" akin to a form of "blindness" (2011:

127). This approach undermines not only humanity's capacity for moral decision-making but also its intrinsic "animality" (127). Gruen asserts that the highest moral responsibility lies in the avoidance of "research with animals" (129). Notably, significant actions have been taken to reduce animal experimentation; for instance, the use of chimpanzees in biomedical research was banned in Europe in 2004, having been declared illegal in the Netherlands (129). Nonhuman animals have often been subjected to abuse under the guise of scientific inquiry, enduring mistreatment and torture "cold-bloodedly" in laboratories "in the name of science" (Beatson, 2011: 43).

The acknowledgment of interactions between humans and nonhuman animals challenges prevailing hierarchies and dualisms; it calls for a reevaluation of moral frameworks, emphasizing ethics of care for both nonhuman animals and the natural world. Embracing Plumwood's ethics, Hunnicutt asserts that nonhuman animals, like humans, possess inherent value (2020: 103). Ethical consideration for nonhuman animals and nature illustrates that while differences exist, they should neither be eradicated nor exploited for the benefit of dominant social groups. Rather, "the integrity of differences" should be respected (103). Consequently, her ecofeminist perspective rejects unjust and immoral attitudes toward nonhuman animals and the environment.

To sum up, the study follows that emotion and morality are central to Len's character. Her primary goal is to establish a non-dualistic relationship with nonhuman animals, particularly birds, despite societal norms and logic. Her ethical and ecofeminist commitment to emotion, morality, and an ethics of care for nonhuman animals and nature is commendable.

7.2. The Social effect of Nature and Nonhuman Animals on Human Life

Humans' interactions with nonhuman animals and nature have reciprocal influences on both sides. These social influences can be either optimistic or pessimistic, depending on human perspectives and their capacity to foster a non-dualistic companionship with nonhuman animals and the natural world. Both optimistic and pessimistic perceptions profoundly impact human life.

7.2.1. *Optimistic Impact*

The non-dualistic interaction between Len and wild birds fosters mutual healing, reflecting a positive connection between humans and the natural world. Throughout the narrative, various beneficial effects of Len's communication with wild birds are highlighted. This interaction helps Len reminisce about her home and cherished family memories while she is in London. The presence of birds and nature serves as a soothing balm for her loneliness:

> "The next morning I get up earlier than usual to make my own tracks, so I can walk without having to follow the tracks of others. A Crow flies cawing overhead—for a moment I miss Charles so intensely that I can hardly breathe. For a moment I miss Olive and my father, even Dudley and everyone else." (Meijer, 2018: 81)

Being in nature and listening to the sounds of wild birds offer Len invaluable moments for contemplation. She often ventures outdoors, describing her surroundings with vivid detail: "there are tall trees on the quayside, with shrubs between," and when she rises early each morning, she finds solace sitting on deck to "listen and look" (Meijer, 2018: 111). In her reflections, she notes that "it's not as loud here as in the city," allowing her to hear herself "think" (111).

Throughout various cultures, spending time in nature and distancing oneself from the chaos of urban life facilitate deeper contemplation. Proximity to nature not only alleviates feelings of loneliness but also fosters profound understanding. Also, it is theoretically proved that an optimistic solitude intertwined with "natural spaces" demonstrates that "being in nature enriches solitude" (Samangooei et al., 2023: 7). Engagement with nonhuman animals and the natural environment promotes comfort and calmness during "moments of solitude" (7). Indeed, the more individuals connect with nonhuman animals and nature, the more they experience the profound effects of "self-reflection"; this self-reflection enables them to contemplate the meaning and value of their lives (Fredrickson and Anderson, 1999: 31). In contrast, many who do not engage in these experiences have expressed deep "regret and frustration for not doing so" (31).

Furthermore, the relationship between humans and nonhuman animals has not been static. The social outcomes of Len's experiences suggest that a non-dualistic interaction between humans and nonhuman animals, such as birds, can indeed be

cultivated in a social context:

> "Star always devoted a great deal of time to rearing her young. She brought them food far longer than most Tits do and taught them various useful skills. One of the things she taught her children each year was that there was no need to be afraid of me. They passed this on to their own children, and so I was the friend not only of particular individuals, but of specific families too." (Meijer, 2018: 118)

When Len distorts the dualisms between herself and wild birds, she cultivates a shared bond that evolves through generations. Together, they form a non-dualistic companionship, recognizing one another as family. Len engages in conversation with the wild birds as if they were individuals, fostering a deep connection:

> "One of the young Great Tits flies out of a lavender bush a little further on, lands right by my feet and hops towards me. 'Hallo, little one,' I say to him. He tilts his head, takes another step forward, but then swiftly flies away again." (Meijer, 2018: 124)

Nature serves as Len's primary refuge. Her interactions with nonhuman animals, such as birds, and her connection to the natural environment profoundly influence her life. Referring to theory in addition to considering the practical analysis, it enriches the discussion to know that Adams and Gruen support the ideas mentioned and they advocate for a non-dualistic approach to engaging with nonhuman animals and nature. Humans are frequently in contact with various others, including other people, nonhuman animals, and the environment. Consequently, human relationships and "networks" are not only shaped by individual experiences but also continuously influence and "form" these relationships over time (Adams and Gruen, 2022: 42).

Moreover, Len finds social relief in nature. She contrasts her experiences in London with her time spent in her remote hut, expressing a preference for the latter. Her mind is "full of voices; the people in the London station, in the packed train carriage—human beings are hardly aware of how much they talk, how loud they are" (Meijer, 2018: 139-140). In contrast, she appreciates being in nature because it allows her to "practice, and swim, and the air's clean" (141). Len experiences the healing effects of nature. The fresh air plays a significant role in her rejuvenation and stress reduction. These healing effects are further highlighted when a friend inquires

about the impact of nature on her well-being. The friend asks, "Do you think things are improving? Do you feel less stifled now? Does the fresh air help?" to which Len responds, "'A bit.' It's not the air, but the space; not the space, but time; not time, but the light" (142).

Len's heart and mind are deeply devoted to wild birds, reflecting her awareness of her integral connection to nature and other animals. She recognizes that human life is inherently dependent on the natural world. Beyond wild birds, Len finds healing in her interactions with other nonhuman animals. For instance, she notes that the "breathing" of "cows" helps her "to relax" and that "their warmth briefly embraces" her (Meijer, 2018: 179). Additionally, the optimistic influence of human-animal relation is supported in theory as well. For instance, research indicates that exposure to nature significantly reduces stress and aids in "recovery" from anxiety to improve mental well-being (Ulrich et al., 1991: 222). Additionally, studies on avian sounds suggest that the calls and songs of certain birds are particularly "beneficial for stress recovery and attention restoration" (Ratcliffe et al., 2013: 222).

Thus, the relationship between humans and animals (e.g. wild birds) is mutually enriching. Both parties influence one another, imparting valuable lessons. Positive and ethical coexistence and companionship with nonhuman animals fosters healing for humans which, in the interim, can gradually lead to better revised human-animal connections which Len experienced through her coexistence with wild birds.

7.2.2. ***Pessimistic Impact: Dualistic Relationship and Its Pessimistic Ramifications***

Secondly, there may be negative influences stemming from the poor relationship between humans and animals. Such pessimistic perceptions can arise from a profound dependency on nonhuman animals or from unsuccessful interactions, such as those characterized by a dualistic perspective. In general, without an ethical framework, pessimistic effect can have a significant impact on human life.

Socially, the pessimism that humans and nonhuman animals hold of one another are influenced by the negative treatment nonhuman animals receive from humans which may result in not only animals' fear of humans sometimes, but also an incorrect perception of human supremacy over nonhumans. A kind coexistence must be established through human actions and behaviors toward nonhuman animals;

otherwise, a dualistic relationship will persist. Accordingly, Len critiques the mistreatment of wild birds and other nonhuman animals, noting that human attitudes toward these beings shape their relationships. For instance, when humans shoot nonhuman animals, it instills fear in them, reinforcing both the binary oppositions between humans and nonhuman animals, as well as a hierarchical relationship. This fear prevents the development of a non-dualistic and congenial companionship. Len illustrates this mistrust with the example of "White-fronted Geese," stating, "they fly up when we come too near. They're growing increasingly timid because each year more of them are shot" (Meijer, 2018: 187).

A transformation in social dynamics—eliminating dualisms and treating nonhuman animals as equals rather than inferiors—can foster an ethical and optimistic perception shared by both humans and nonhuman animals. Such an approach would facilitate the formation of a reciprocal, non-hierarchical relationship. However, Len critically examines the contemporary human tendency to control nature and exploit nonhuman animals. She asserts, "it's impossible not to get attached to individual birds, and they don't live very long, as a rule" (Meijer, 2018: 202). This critique underscores human interference in nature, often leading to the exploitation of both nonhuman animals and the environment. Factors contributing to the short lifespans of birds or their extinction frequently include human encroachment and hunting practices which are examples of human supremacy over nonhumans and lead to pessimistic human-animal relation.

Furthermore, when Theo (Len's friend) inquires about Len's reason for leaving the city, she responds that urban environments and the people within them are oppressive (Meijer, 2018: 208). Len as a woman has the experience of oppression in the society which leads her to have this argument. For instance, once she is being betrayed by a male friend of her (Meijer, 2018: 191) and another time she is being treated negatively by the head of a construction factory called "Thompson and Co." (Meijer, 2018: 229). Considering these examples, she assumes that human beings can be so oppressive to one another; this leads her to escape from others. As another example, according to the attempts of construction factory for ruining the birds' habitats (Meijer, 2018: 7-8,10-13), she also may have perceived that those who exhibit a lack of compassion toward fellow humans may be unlikely to display mercy toward

vulnerable nonhuman animals like birds. Clearly, considering Len's experience, it is appropriate to mention that modern humans adopt an inadequate attitude toward nature and nonhuman animals, which is critiqued in the novel.

Considering the examples mentioned, the pessimistic human-animal relation is criticized theoretically as well. Anthropocentrism significantly influences human-animal interactions, often leading to the perception of women and nonhuman animals as "less human" and inferior (Plumwood, 1991: 21). This mindset creates dualisms that undermine the foundation for ethical companionship between humans and animals. By emphasizing human supremacy, such dichotomies foster the belief that humans are fundamentally different from nonhuman animals and nature (Plumwood, 2012: 15). Given the pessimistic implications of anthropocentrism, there is a pressing need to dismantle these dichotomies. Ethics and ecofeminism play crucial roles in mutilating these structures of injustice. Ecofeminists argue that "all parts of a system" possess equal rights and significance, asserting that the Earth is the shared home for all beings, whether human or nonhuman (Merchant, 1981: 10).

As a result, considering both optimistic and pessimistic aspects of human-animal relations Generally, in *Bird Cottage*, by Len's practices and examples mentioned, it may be inferred that non-dualistic communication with wild birds and other animals can be established through an ethical approach and a non-dualistic attitude. According to Len's experience it is witnessed that probably such coexistence positively influences both human and nonhuman animals socially. Conversely, a dualistic or failed relationship can have detrimental effects on both groups. Therefore, the impact of these interactions is contingent upon the quality of the relationship, resulting in either optimistic or pessimistic outcomes.

8. Conclusion

Ecofeminism encompasses not only an ethical perspective toward nonhuman animals and nature but also critiques the dualisms of reason/emotion and human/animal through the lenses of ethics and morality. In *Bird Cottage* by Eva Meijer, the character Len embodies a moral and ethical approach toward wild birds while also deforming the human/animal dichotomy through ethical considerations. Throughout the plot there are numerous examples of her attitude and action which aid to support

Len's ethical-ecofeminist influence on her human-animal relation with birds. This article employs an ecofeminist framework to analyze *Bird Cottage*, drawing upon the work of prominent critics such as Merchant, Hunnicutt, Gruen, and some other critics to explore the interdisciplinary significance of ethics in ecofeminism and their impact on dismantling the human/animal dualism.

Merchant's partnership ethics, Hunnicutt's egalitarian perspective towards nonhuman animals and nature, and Gruen's concept of entangled empathy exemplify ethical visions within ecofeminism that contribute to the deformation of the boundaries between human and nonhuman animals. Furthermore, the article examines both dualistic and non-dualistic aspects of the social relationship between humans and animals, advocating for a non-dualistic approach to these interactions.

Statements and Declarations

Thesis Declaration

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