
Species Relationship and Animal Cruelty in Karen Joy Fowler's *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*

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Abstract:

Over time, multiplicity or replication has influenced life, and life itself has in various ways affected and been affected by the physical environment. A typical example of a member of the physical environment that has been expressly affected by man is the non-human members of the environment especially, animals. Cruelty against animals is an emerging concern in global ecological discourse in recent times. This paper however examines species relationship and animal cruelty in Karen Joy Fowler's *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*. The objective is to critically investigate how man relates with animals and the spate of cruelty against animals in the physical environment. In order to achieve this set intention, the study engages the theoretical exposition of ecocriticism mainly because of its commitment to environmentalist philosophy. Contrary to a jaundiced belief that animals should not make ecologic discourses, the research reveals that animals are members of the physical environment but are subjected to oppressive cruelty. It shows also that animal rights advocacy is within the purview of environmental literature. The study indicates that species relationships can be a useful standard for gauging the health of the ecosystem.

Keywords: Species, relationships, animals, cruelty.

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Introduction:

From the time man became an indefinite large species; he has affected and been affected by the physical environment at one point or the other. He lives with the false impression that nature lives only for the comfort and convenience of man and anything less, to him, is a complete hoax. In such deceitful pretence, man continues to infringe on the rights and freedom of animals. Animals are unfairly subjected to various acts of violence and are also compelled to severe sufferings and hardship despite the fact that animals are one among several species in the physical environment. In his quest for luxury and comfort, man unduly exploits animals by way of fistula, insemination, conscription, confinement, butchering, and for scientific and laboratory experimentations respectively. In most cases, animals are also subjected fight against each other without knowing the reasons for their actions. Repeatedly, animals suffer severe neglect and starvation from their keepers, and all of these ill treatments are seen as cruelty against animals. A wealth of knowledge, scientific discoveries and anecdotal evidences demonstrate that certain species are also subjects of a life in the sense that they possess inherent values bestow on them naturally. Therefore, it is not up to man to bestow rights onto animals but rather has a role in recognizing these rights. The relationship between man and the non-human world, especially animals has recently become explicit theme in environmental discourses, and has however paved way for the birth of animal rights advocacy. Recent understanding indicates that species relationships can be useful in measuring the health of the ecosystem. Since the loss of symbiosis is an early sign of a dwindling environmental health, it therefore becomes important to examine the negative impacts humans can have on their interactions with other

species in the physical environment. It is common knowledge that animal abuse abounds in various homes, factories, industries and farms and to protect the rights of these helpless animals, the animal rights movement, tackles the problem of cruelty against animals by advocating for better laws and regulations to prevent intentional animal suffering.

The supreme intention of the animal rights advocacy is to place animals above use by human beings, putting a stop to exploitative industries and practices against animals including but not limited to using animals as species of laboratory examinations. The truth is that animals are hugely understood as suffering from emotional, psychological, and physical trauma through the activities of man. Man has been unfair with his interactions with animals. It should be noted that when discussing animal rights, it is not suggested that animals be given equal rights as humans, such as the right to vote or be voted for during elections or be counted during the national census, no. Rather, the rights referred to tends to be the primary of freedom from unnecessary confinement, freedom from bodily injuries and other kinds of maltreatment against animals as would be identified in the coming pages of the article.

Unequivocally, some critics would readily query what it really means to bring the issue of animal cruelty and rights advocacy into the discourse of environmental literature, when attention should be largely or solely devoted to environmental degradation and pollution. Fortunately, Eddy (n.d; p13) asserts that "...environmental justice movement has indirectly heightened concern not only for human existence, but also for animals and plant life" readily deflects such erroneous pattern of thoughts. The reality today is that animals and their rights are emerging themes in eco-

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critical dialogues, yet, some critics and researchers have shown scant or no interest at all in the welfare of these animals who are no less members of the physical environment as human beings. Commendably, some scholars believe that one of the byproducts of environmental literature is the topical issue of animal rights and welfare, and as such have wondered why a topical subject of such relevance should attract scanty literary documentation.

Theoretical Framework

Ecocriticism as a critical theory is the study of representation of nature in literary works and of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Some critics have argued that one of the reasons ecocriticism has continued to flourish is the continued global environmental crises and that what these environmental crises have done is to generate in writers, the tendency towards exposing and mediating in the seemingly unprofitable ecological challenges. As a theory, ecocriticism tries to show how the works of writers concerned about the environment can play a major part in solving real and pressing ecological concerns. Ecocriticism is a multidisciplinary field that has one leg on literature and the other on ecology. According to Cheryll (1996; p.xix) ecocriticism “has one foot on literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman.” The term ecocriticism is coined in 1978 by William Rueckert in his essay, “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism”.

Textual Analysis

Species relationship has been defined differently by different scholars as it appears to them. In his definition of species relationship, David (2015) writes that, “organisms occupy what are called Niches. A niche includes the physical space in which they live, how they use the resources that are in that space, and how they interact with other organisms in that space.”(p.1) On the other hand, animal cruelty is multi-dimensional and it covers both the intentional and unintentional acts of violence towards animals which manifest in partial or total animal neglect, or the failure to provide for the welfare of animals under one’s control. In addition to this, it is important to note that cruelty against animals is not restricted to cases involving physical harm; it also includes such acts like dehorning, de-toeing, castration, shearing, de-feathering and the act of cutting birds’ beak etc. More closely, animal cruelty involves intentional and unintentional infliction of harm or suffering on animals for specific achievement, such as killing animals for food or for their fur and subjecting them to fight for entertainment. Agreed, man has unfettered dominance over animals one would say, but a deliberate act of inflicting avoidable harm on animals in

the process of asserting dominance amounts to cruelty against them. Inflicting psychological harm on animal in the form of distress, torment or terror also constitutes animal cruelty. Animal cruelty is deemed generally as an act or omission that causes unnecessary and reasonable harm to animals. Even as this paper is being prepared, this writer believes that innocent animals are abused, neglected or forced to fight. The first step to creatively alleviate the sufferings of these animals is to first recognize the fact that cruelty to them is unfair and condemnable.

Karen Fowler’s animal rights novel re-echoes the call to action for everyone, especially women to add their voices to the struggle against animal cruelty and animal rights advocacy in the globe. The disappearance of Fern, a fictionalized character in the novel causes serious cracking the Cook’s family as Rosemary finds it hard to live without Fern, who she sees as a sister. Rosemary eventually seeks out her sister, and allows herself to confront the horror of what Fern’s life must have become. She decried that, “whatever it was, it happened because no woman had stopped it. The women who should have stood with Fern – my mother, the female grad students, me – none of us had helped. Instead, we had exiled her to a place completely devoid of female solidarity.” Fowler uses the disappearance and subsequent imprisonment of Fern as an avenue to expose the level of evil perpetrated against animals globally irrespective of the fact that animals are members of the physical environment. Fowler’s indictment of the womenfolk for the sufferings and brutality of animals, therefore serves as a wakeup call for the concerted effort of all and sundry towards the liberation of animals that are obviously voiceless even as members of the natural environment. After all, if according to Fowler (2013, p.169–170) “Mobbing is a natural human behaviour, empathy is also a natural human behaviour, and natural to chimps as well. When we see someone hurt, our brains respond to some extent as if we’d been hurt ourselves...we access our own experiences with pain and extend them to the current sufferer. We are nice that way.”

Rosemary does not talk about her sister and, if so, does not mention that Fern is a chimpanzee. She knows that revelation will irrevocably shift people’s perception and invalidate her own experience: Fern is her sister. Rosemary’s mother commenting on shared similarities between her daughter and Fern says, “so much like you, only with a lot of suffering added” (Fowler 2013; p. 287) . She continues, “I told your dad I didn’t see how the two of you could be compared when your world had been so gentle and hers so cruel” (Fowler 2013, p. 287) . As her awareness grows, Rosemary realizes that she must use her words on her sister’s behalf, for Fern, for the voiceless animals.

Carrying out frivolous scientific experiments or demonstrations upon animals that cause them substantial pain or distress is equally viewed by Fowler as act of cruelty. Mobilizing support for the defence and liberation of animals from oppression and exploitation, the author overtly condemns the actions of scientists against animal rights and liberty. She rejects the situation whereby man in the name of practicing science, subjects' animals to undue harassment and severe suffering in a bid to make a scientific discovery. To Fowler, humans and animals are the same and feel the same pains, hence, "here is what I'd thought it meant. I'd thought Fern was apologizing. When you feel bad, I feel bad, is what I got from that red chip. We're the same, you and I" What Fowler implies here is that there is no fundamental difference between man and animals, and as such, animals' ability to feel pain as humans does make their well-being worthy of consideration. In apparent demonstration of her rejection of cruelty against animals, Fowler insists that, "she didn't like how lab animals were treated" (p.203). Still frowning at the roles of scientists on animal cruelty, the author sadly alleges that scientist:

Had taken rhesus monkey infants away from their mothers and given them inanimate mothers instead, mothers made alternatively of terrycloth or wire, to see which, in the absence of other choices, the babies preferred. He claimed, deliberately provocative, to be studying love. The baby monkeys clung pathetically to the fake, uncaring mother, until they all turned psychotic or died. "I don't know what he thought he'd learned about them," Lowell said. "But in their short, sad little lives, they sure learned a hell of a lot about him. (P..201)

The excerpt above vividly captures the conversation between Lowell and Rosemary about how their father, a psychologist-scientist subjects' animals to untold hardship in the name of psychological study of non-human animals, which however is highly convoluted and cumbersome. To further buttress the involvement of science and scientists in the regrettable acts of terrorism against animals, Fowler 3) further writes that:

Britches' little eyes had been sewn shut the day he was born, to test some sonic equipment designed for blind babies. The plan was to keep him alive for about three years in a state of sensory deprivation and then kill him to see what that had done to the visual, auditory, and motor-skill parts of the brain. I didn't want a world in which I had to choose between blind human babies and tortured monkeys ones. To be frank, that's the sort of choice I expect science to protect me from, not give me. (1There here is no anti-science message here, but a veiled attack adopted by Fowler to discourage the unnecessary humiliating actions committed by scientists against animals. (p.219)

To further expose the level of cruelty by scientists against animals Fowler (2013) cries out, "I

remembered the 170 rapes over three days from Dr. Sosa's lecture. Some scientists had observed all that, had watched a chimp raped 170 times and kept count. Good scientist." (p.239) Fowler (2013) is, however, of the view that "all violence that purports to have a religious basis is a distortion of true religion" (p.233) It is indeed, common knowledge according to Fowler that, "when science becomes a religion, it stops being science" (234). This universal truth may have prompted XU Gang's assertion that "Science is effective but not unlimited" (18). Fowler's indictment against science raises concern over the roles of science and scientists against the environment, as she challenges the situation in which science offers her the choice that it should have protected her from in the first place. Ordinarily, scientists are expected to proffer solutions to ecological challenges, but contributing to such challenges affirms Cheryll (1996) assertion that, "if we are not part of the solution, we're part of the problem." (p.xxi) In essence, the forceful taking away of the infant animals, in Fowler's view, is comparable to human trafficking in the real sense of it. This is on the heels of the reason that most animals, like Fern, are no more living on the farm but have been forcefully taken to live in misery, hence "when I got to Fern, there was no need ignoring the fact that she wasn't now and never had been on a farm, that she'd left our house for a life of imprisonment and misery" (Cheryll 1996; p.268).

Another form of cruelty against animals raised in the novel is the issue of artificial insemination and this poses great concern to the author. To her, animals should be allowed to enjoy sexual intercourse by at least, having the liberty to choose which species of animals to have sex with and not forcing animal semen on them. Animals as it seems to the author should have a say in what concerns them, especially their sexual life and anything less, rape and dictatorship that must be checked. Some researchers are alleged to have attempted inseminating animals with human sperm in a fruitless effort to create a human-chimpanzee. Recounting this story to Rosemary, Rosemary's mother says, "I did not say that I'd read about Ilya' Ivanovich Ivanov, who in the 1920s made several attempts to create a humanzee (sic) hybrid, the elusive humanzee. He'd inseminated chimps with human sperm..." (Fowler, p.288). There are growing cases of artificial insemination of animals by ranchers thereby depriving them of the joy or fun of sexual intercourse.

Man's negative attitudes against animals are highly regrettable and should be discouraged if the much-needed global environmental peace would be attained, because animals play significant roles to mankind despite what torments and harm man inflict on them. Fowler (2013; p.209) writes, "How even after everything, she (Fern) protected me from that alpha male. The price she paid for that. The way her face looked when I left her

there.” Cruelty against animals is an indirect cruelty against man because according to the author, “humans learn to be cruel to humans by first being cruel to animals” (Fowler's 2013; p.233) . Almost everywhere, animals in their different species, ages, sizes, and colours have been exploited, tortured, and tormented pretentiously and in different strategies by man. The author makes efforts to expose various degrees of cruelty against animals, and in doing this, Fowler (2013; p.231) reveals that “generations of beagles were exposed to strontium-90 and radium-226, their voice boxes removed so that no one would hear them suffering.”

Yet, there is the issue of cruelty against animals involving industrialists and company owners as they intentionally and unintentionally inflict harm and pain on animals in the process of running their companies. These acts of terrorism on animals are however sources of worry thus, “he talked about car companies that, as part of their crash studies, subjected fully conscious and terrified baboons to repeated, horrific, excruciating blows to the head” (Fowler;p.231) . Car companies are not alone in this act of terrorism against animals, the author complains “about drug companies that vivisected dogs, lab techs that shouted at them to cut the shit if they whined or struggled.” It is obvious that Fowler is an ardent animal activist, and in her defence of animal liberation, she condemns “cosmetic companies that smeared chemicals into the eyes of screaming rabbits and euthanized them afterward if the damage was permanent or else did it to them again if they recovered” (Fowler; p.231) .

Some animal rights advocates are of the view that animal cruelty has long been an issue with the art form of filmmaking, with even some big-budget films receiving sharp criticism for the allegedly harmful and sometimes lethal treatment of animals during film productions. It is believed that animals are brutalized and even killed during film production. In the recent past, it is alleged that some video-sharing sites have been criticized for hosting a condemnable number of videos of real animal cruelty, especially the feeding of one animal to another for entertainment and spectacle. In most parts of Nigeria for instance, especially in the South Western region, Bullfighting and situations where rams are compelled to fight either for entertainment or as a source of income are on the increase. Those who engage in this ungodly enterprise fail to understand that they inflict pain on these innocent animals. Simulations of animal cruelty exist also on pain, too. Condemning the act of cruelty against animals during film productions, Fowler (2013) reveals that:

...Chimps in the entertainment industry were always babies because by adolescence they'd be too strong to control. These babies, who should have still been riding on their mother's backs, were shut into isolated cages and

beaten with baseball bats so that later, on the sets of movies, merely displaying the bat would assure compliance. The credits could claim that no animal had been harmed in the filming of this movie because the harm had all happened before the shooting began (p.232) .

Farm animals are in most cases produced in large, industrial facilities that house thousands of animals at high density. Many routine procedures or animal husbandry practices impinge on the welfare of the animals and could be arguably considered cruelty. Animal cruelty is typified by and occurs when there are cases of neglect, in which the cruelty is a lack of action rather than the action itself. Examples of neglect include but are not limited to; starvation, overfeeding, dehydration, parasite infestation, etc. In most cases, animals suffer situations in which they are given steroids that enable them to grow at an unusual speed, so fast that their bones, heart, and lungs often cannot withstand it. Broiler chickens under six weeks old for instance, suffer painful crippling due to induced fast growth rates, while one in a hundred of these young birds die of avoidable heart failure. Opposing this act of cruelty against animals, Fowler complains bitterly, “about the stuffed battery cages of the chicken industry, where, just as my uncle Bob had been saying for years, they were breeding birds that couldn't stand up, much as walk” (232) .

Fowler recounts further as she exposes various agents that contribute to animals live of painful, exploitation, and torture by non-human animals. The author does not advocate doing away with cruelty to animals so much as hiring someone to manage man's cruelty for him. Fowler's main concern is that man should keep his hands clean over non-human animals, though this has unfortunately turned out to be pretty much the way man has not done it. She affirms this truism by saying that, “everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself” (232) . Corroborating Fowler's standpoint on cruelty against animals, Lynn (1996) posits that “quite unintentionally, changes in human ways often affect nonhuman nature. It has been noted, for example, that the advent of automobile eliminated huge flocks of sparrows that once fed on the horse manure littering every street...”(p.4) It is observable from Lynn's standpoint that man in his anthropocentrism from time immemorial has deliberately oppressed and tormented animals just for the fun of doing so. Daily, animals receive one form of torture and harsh treatment or the other from man. Nonetheless, Lynn and Fowler may have turned a blind eye to the fact that some animals will probably be harmed in the process of food production to some extent, but surely there is a difference between exploiting and intentional killing of animals for food.

Daily, and even as this paper is being prepared, animals are conscripted from farms for a life of torture and misery

and are most times killed for one reason or the other. In most cases, animals are forced to undergo fistulas to the extent that one could reach right into the animals and feel their intestines. The list of invasive procedures which cause pain, routinely performed on farm animals, and housing conditions that routinely cause animal welfare concern keeps growing by the day. In her preachment for the rights of animals and a stoppage to animal misery, Fowler condemns the act of intentional infliction of pain on animals by deliberately cutting open their stomachs in a way that their digestive system can be seen. It is Fowler's approach of condemning fistula practices in animal husbandry, and in doing so, she reveals that:

Up at the vet school, Davis had a famous fistulated (sic) cow, a cow with a deliberate hole punched into its stomach through which digestive processes could be observed...you could reach right into that cow, and feel her intestines. Hundreds of people had done so... It was his firm belief that Davis had multiple fistulated cows. They were all named Maggie, every one of them, to fool people into thinking there was only one cow and not start asking questions about excessive fistulations, Lowell said. (Fowler 2013; p.200)

This excerpt is an intrepid condemnation and repudiation by Fowler, of the grave injustice in animal fistulas which have become a trending exercise in the global animal husbandry. To deceive the unsuspecting public, the author reveals how the fistulated (sic) animals are named Maggie just to make it look as if only one animal has undergone a fistula in Davis. To Fowler, the only route to global environmental peace is to stop the complaints by men of eco-degradation and to embrace the fight against animal cruelty. Fowler puts it that, "enough with the tears and regrets. Lowell had said that Fern was my job now. Hadn't she has always been so? ...Fern could not be left in a cage in a lab" (Fowler; p.227) . Sadly, the world according to Fowler "runs on the fuel of this endless, fathomless misery. People know it but they don't mind what they don't see. Make them look and they mind, but you're the one they hate because you are the one that makes them look" (Fowler; p.232) . The excerpt above is a confirmation that the health of the ecosystem can be measured by our relationship with animals within the space we share with them. The environment needs to be positively treated, first by treating the non-human animals as members of the natural environment. If this unnatural treatment against animals persists, the animals had better have good lawyers to advocate and defend their natural rights. In defence of the urgent need for animals to have good lawyers to defend them, Rueckert(2018), argues that "the idea that nature should be protected by human laws, that trees (dolphins, and whales, hawks, and whooping cranes) should have lawyers to articulate and defend their rights is one of the most marvellous and characteristic parts of the ecological vision" (108) . Aligning with the

suggestion that animals had better have good lawyers to articulate and defend their natural rights, Fowler (2013) maintains that:

A nonhuman animal had better have a good lawyer. In 1508, Bartholome Chassenee earned fame and fortune for his eloquent representation of the rats of his French province. These rats had been charged with destroying the barley crop and also with ignoring the court order to appear and defend themselves. Bartholome Chassenee argued successfully that the rats hadn't come because the court had failed to provide reasonable protection from the village cats along the route. (306)

Funny as the assertion above may sound, it is an indictment subtly proffered by Fowler against man to show how unsafe the ecosystem has suddenly become for animals, which ordinarily are supposed members of the natural environment. Conversely, Fowler's statement is a global call for solidarity for animal rights advocacy. It is a call for more support for the activities of the Animal Liberation Front, a movement which according to the author does not "countenance physical harm to any animal, human or otherwise" (238) . The Animal Liberation Front is, according to Fowler, a movement you don't enlist in "by sympathizing, writing about how sorry and sad the suffering of animals makes you" Fowler (2013) at least one is expected to do something to save animals from further. In the fight for the liberation of animals from lives of misery, the infliction of economic damage is a goal, as is the need to publicize abuse –bringing those horrors occurring in their secret chambers out into the open. It is a call for the cognition of the sufferings and humiliation of animals in growing harsh environments where they have lost the privilege of defending themselves in the court of the public domain. Fowler's novel solicits participation and commitment in animal rights advocacy; a commitment to the belief that other living things, no matter how distant or dissimilar, are safe from harm and exploitation. The story, however, plumbs the mystery of our strange relationship with the animal kingdom. Indeed, animals should have equal natural rights as human beings, and affirming this fact, Aldo (1987) reveals that the "so-called deep ecologists argue that nature possesses the same moral standing and natural rights as humans." (p,9)

Conclusion

What Fowler succeeds in doing in her chimp novel is to roundly and frontally condemn any action that inflicts cruelty against animals despite where it might be coming from, whether human or non-human as the case may be. Again, Fowler preaches love and care for non-human animals globally and aptly propagates this gospel of love and gracious disposition to animals globally, and she adopts sundry strategies. Karen Joy Fowler, an ardent eco-campaigner and eco-crusader, in the novel, challenges the validity of using non-human animals

exclusively as a means to humans' end, condemning it as wrong, just as it would be to use humans exclusively as means to humans' end. The novel queries the excuse of necessary animal use particularly; scientific experiments, fistulas, insemination, hunting, and killings for meat. She reveals and challenges the various means of exploiting, harming, torturing, and killing by men out of circumstantial necessity to justify their participation in the completely unnecessary exploitation and killing of other animals. Fowler through her fictionalized chimpanzee (Fern), rejects any cruel or degrading treatments against animals and agrees that the current global relationship between man and animals is hugely destructive and condemnable. The study, however, reveals that the relationship between man and animals is exploitative and oppressive. It is also the finding of the research that species relationships can be used as a standard for measuring global environmental health because the loss of symbiosis is an early sign of receding environmental health.

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