



## HUMAN INTERFERENCES TO REWILD THE NATURE DEPICTED IN CHARLOTTE MCCONAGHY'S *ONCE THERE WERE WOLVES*

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### ABSTRACT

*Environmental problems have become a severe issue in recent decades. The world has started to change due to human activities that affect the natural environment. Deforestation, industrialization, burning fuels, human overpopulation, and many more have triggered climate change. In her novel, Once There Were Wolves, Charlotte McConaghy vividly describes such a condition. This novel exposes how the Scottish Highlands begins to ruin because of the overabundant population of deer. They eat the plant shoots, and that makes the plants die. Moreover, this research intends to investigate human interferences in saving damaged nature as depicted in the novel. This study is a literary criticism since it aims to analyze the object used. Furthermore, the Ecocriticism approach was employed to analyze humans' efforts to help nature return to its natural state. The research method involves a deep reading and understanding of Charlotte McConaghy's Once There Were Wolves, with a focus on the humans' effort to rewild nature. The result reveals the portrayal of humans' actions to help nature back into its natural state by releasing wolves as the apex predator, keeping the forest and vegetation, and finding places to grow trees. Doing those actions helps the Scottish Land back naturally. The deer population decreases and the land becomes a beautiful place to go.*

**Keywords:** environment, Ecocriticism, human interferences, rewilding.

### ABSTRAK

Masalah lingkungan telah menjadi isu serius dalam beberapa dekade terakhir. Dunia telah mulai berubah akibat aktivitas manusia yang mempengaruhi lingkungan alam. Deforestasi, industrialisasi, pembakaran bahan bakar, kelebihan populasi manusia, dan banyak lagi telah memicu perubahan iklim. Dalam novelnya, *Once There Were Wolves*, Charlotte McConaghy menggambarkan dengan jelas kondisi tersebut. Novel ini mengungkap bagaimana pegunungan tinggi Skotlandia mulai hancur karena populasi rusa yang berlimpah. Mereka memakan tunas-tunas tanaman, sehingga tanaman-tanaman tersebut mati. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji campuran tangan manusia dalam menyelamatkan alam yang rusak seperti yang digambarkan dalam novel tersebut. Penelitian ini merupakan kritik sastra karena fokus untuk menganalisis objek yang digunakan. Penelitian ini memerlukan pembacaan dan pemahaman yang mendalam dalam novel *Once There Were Wolves* karya Charlotte McConaghy dengan fokus upaya manusia untuk melestarikan lingkungan. Hasilnya, ditemukan gambaran usaha manusia untuk mengembalikan lingkungan, seperti membebaskan serigala sebagai predator puncak, menjaga hutan dan vegetasinya, dan mencari tempat untuk menanam pohon. Dengan melakukan hal-hal tersebut, Skotlandia berhasil kembali seperti awalnya. Populasi rusa bisa berkurang dan dataran Skotlandia menjadi tempat yang indah untuk dikunjungi.

**Kata kunci:** lingkungan, Ekokritik, interferensi manusia, pengembalian alam

Received: 20 July 2023

Revised: 04 September 2023

Accepted: 20 September 2023

*How to cite:* Rachmasari F.A., & Thoyib M.E. (2023). *Human Interferences to Rewild The Nature Depicted in Charlotte McConaghy's Once There Were Wolves*. ELITE: English and Literature Journal, 10(2). 203-211.



## **INTRODUCTION**

Nature has changed a lot compared to decades ago. Humans face many environmental issues, and they have to take this as a consequence of doing things that harm nature (Paradewari et al., 2018). Thus, people need to have an awareness of this thing matter. Humans are responsible for managing, using, and conserving the universe (Nadiyah, 2018). People nowadays do not have a good relationship with nature, including animals. Humans exploit and treat animals improperly (Chairani et al., 2019). As humans' destructive behaviors are depicted in *Once There Were Wolves*; it shows that Ecocriticism opposes the excessive exploitation of nature. Nature has given humans many benefits. However, human activity caused many harmful impacts on nature (Hove et al., 2020).

Ecocriticism also shows the relationship between humans and animals. As the researcher is required to analyze the relationship between these two, several studies strengthen the references about Ecocriticism. The studies are from (Chairani et al., 2019; Islam 2018; Bhushan 2021; Nsah 2018). These articles focus on how humans and animals can make and build a good bond. Humans and animals live on the same planet, and they have the same rights to live. However, humans start to destroy the ecosystem, which makes animals dwindle. Thus, these studies were conducted to show and make people try to respect nature because nature and humans are considered to be equal and not in a domineering or hierarchical relationship.

This research shows the relationship between nature, humans, and animals based on the novel *Once There Were Wolves*. It also portrays the environmental problems that affect nature and animals. The researcher focuses on how the scientists in the novel try to save the Scottish Highlands from the environmental imbalance caused by the overpopulated herbivores. They agreed to do a rewilding project by releasing wolves to the land. They believe that releasing wolves will help reduce the overabundant herbivore population and help back the natural environment in Scotland.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Ecocriticism**

Ecocriticism emphasizes the conservation of environmental and ecological balance. It shows the interrelationship of human societies with their respective surroundings (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996). Ecocriticism directly relates people as human beings to the environment (Bressler, 2011). This approach focuses on the fact that humans should take action to keep nature safe. Ecocriticism can be supported to find, define, and accomplish ecological problems. This theory reveals the reciprocal relationship between humans and nature. Furthermore, Ecocriticism focuses on the environmental themes and nature written in literary works (Buell, 2005).

### **Human Interference**

Following the environmental damage in recent decades, humans need to take action to save nature. People's actions can significantly contribute to helping nature and minimizing the potential of climate change. Making generous and simultaneous actions will transform and create a better place or condition for humans (Crist et al., 2021). There are several interferences that humans can do to help nature restore to its natural state. starting from the smallest things such as reducing ecological footprint by recycling, reusing, and reducing trash, conserving nature by doing small actions like planting trees and wildflowers around the house and keeping the vegetation (Muñoz et al., 2019).

### **Rewilding**

Rewilding is a strategy to create a conservation, self-sustaining ecosystem involving protection and reintroduction. Some versions of rewilding nature show that it aims to recover the trophic networks by releasing some species, such as predators (Bu'hone et al., 2022). Rewilding has clear relevance and might provide excellent programs to restore the woodland

and reintroduce the species (Brown et al., 2012). Some simple ways to rewilding nature include finding places to grow trees and plants, planting the trees in the garden, and preserving them

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study uses literary criticism since it aims to analyze and examine a phenomenon in a literary work. It involves a close analysis of a particular literary text. In this case, the text used is a novel entitled *Once There Were Wolves* by Charlotte McConaghy. Literature is usually established as works of writing since they deal with thoughts of timelessness and common interest of exceptional artistry (Fard, 2016).

This research also applies the Ecocriticism approach that shows the relationship between humans and nature through literary works. Ecocriticism emphasizes the relationship of people as human beings to the environment (Bressler, 2011). Ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach in any literary studies. Moreover, this approach also elaborates on species extinction, global warming, air pollution, deforestation, climate change, and other ecological crises worldwide (Mukhtar, 2017). Those crises are the aspect of human organization that emerges from humankind's connection with nature. Furthermore, human life should be independent and not reckon it as an inevitable inference in human society (Garrard, 2004). As the novel contains environmental issues, this research views the ecological problem in the Ecocriticism approach.

The researcher collects the data by doing detailed reading and understanding the essential element, highlighting the data about environmental issues caused by the overabundant population of deer, and marking the data issues that show people's actions to save nature. Furthermore, the data is also being analyzed by elaborating the data from the background of the study and giving supporting evidence, describing humans' efforts to rewild nature, and drawing conclusions about the impacts humans' actions by doing rewilding processes based on the novel which bring a big success to help nature in Scottish Highland back to its natural state.

## **FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

### **Human Interferences to Rewild the Nature**

*Once There Were Wolves* shows that the Scottish Highlands is now suffering due to the environmental imbalance caused by deer's overabundant population. The deer eat the natural vegetation and make the native plants die. A scientist team led by Inti Flynn realizes that they should be the one who takes a step to help the land back into its natural state. They decided to do a project called rewilding.

Rewilding has been practically used in some countries in Europe. This project is a possible option that human beings can do for abandoned agricultural land. Rewilding focuses on maintaining nature, and one of the primary focuses is conservation activity (Corlett, 2016). Moreover, some versions of rewilding nature show that it aims to recover the trophic network by releasing apex predators (Bu'hone et al., 2022). The concept of rewilding that released apex predators was practiced in National Park in the USA. It brought massive success and helped the environment slowly back into its natural state. Thus, they believe their project will succeed, as in Yellowstone National Park. Several things can be done with rewilding depicted in the novel, such as releasing a predator into the wild nature, finding places to grow trees, and protecting the forests and vegetation.

### **Releasing a Predator**

One of the best ways to do rewilding in the Scottish Highlands, based on the novel, is by releasing predators. Rewilding emphasizes the recovery of trophic networks by releasing species or species translocation. It includes predators (Bu'hone et al., 2022). Predators hunt the herbivores. Thus, Flynn's team agreed they should release predators to help Scotland back. Releasing a predator can be one of the good ways to rewild nature. Scientists believe that

predators will help nature to return all kinds of plants and vegetation. It will also help and affect the water supply. If the water supply runs well, it will grow the forest.

In *Once There Were Wolves*, the released predators are wolves. Inti Flynn and her scientist team release fourteen wolves. The scientists try their best to protect nature while also protecting the wolves, as in the quotation below:

*The others drink sparkling wine in the kitchenette to celebrate our having released all fourteen gray wolves into their three acclimation pens. However, they have yet to be free, our wolves; the experiment has barely begun (p. 4).*

From that quotation, the researcher wants to show that the scientists have already released the fourteen gray wolves to their acclimation pens. Those wolves are not free to enjoy their new habitat. Flynn and her team are still observing them because their experiment is still new and has barely begun. This project is still new to Flynn and the team, and this experiment needs extra surveillance.

As releasing wolves is a new method in the Scottish Highlands to rewild nature, the scientists are confident enough and believe that this project will be successful. They researched rewilding in other countries. However, they released other predator species in other countries, such as Lynx (Helmer et al., 2015). To help this project succeed, Flynn's team tries to persuade the locals that this project will have good impacts on nature in the Scottish Highlands.

The scientists also monitor the wolves well. They not only release them into the wilderness but also ensure that the wolves are safe and comfortable with their new environment. They bring big cages and let the wolves out as they want while learning their movements. They observe whether the wolves are comfortable and can begin to adapt in the Scottish Highlands.

The scientists also try to convince the local people that they released the wolves to help nature back into its natural state. Evan and Anne explain that there are wolves that are going to be released wild from their pens at the end of winter. It means that they will start the new journey by releasing the gray wolves freely, as in:

There are now three pens holding a total of fourteen wolves within the Cairngorms National Park, and come the end of winter, the wolves will be released from these pens to live freely in the Scottish Highlands. They are here specifically for a rewilding effort in a broader attempt to slow climate change and on an experimental basis (p.16).

From the quotation above, the scientists meet the local people of the Scottish Highlands to explain that the wolves will be 'a tool' to help the damaged nature. They are ready to release them in the Cairngorms National Park. Although this project is still new, they believe that rewilding the Scottish Highlands will help to slow climate change.

Wolves help to restore vegetation by controlling the massive deer population in the Scottish Highlands. As wolves are the apex predators, they regulate the herbivore populations. Thus, the ecosystem will slowly become more resilient and reduce the impact of climate change impacts.

The novel states that the Scottish Highlands are starting to be damaged because the food chains are ruined. Deer became the top food chain because there was no predator. Predators such as wolves are deer's prey. The deer are too overpopulated, and it causes overgrazing that destroys nature. They eat tree and plant shoots, so it has no chance to grow.

Overabundant deer populations affect the ecosystem by suppressing forest regeneration (Raynor et al., 2010). Deer eat trees and herbaceous plant species. If it continues, it is not impossible that some plant species will be extinct one day. Thus, releasing predators is the best option for the Scottish Highlands, as in the quotation below:

The only way to do this is to control the herbivore population, and the simplest, most effective way to do that is to reintroduce a keystone predator species that was here long before we were. The vital predation element of the ecosystem has been missing in this land for hundreds of years since wolves were hunted to extinction. Killing the wolves

was a massive blunder on our part. Ecosystems need apex predators because they elicit dynamic ecological changes that ripple down the food chain, and these are known as 'trophic cascades (p.16).

Reintroducing the keystone predator is the best way. A better habitat will be created. With the return of the ecosystem, it will be a better habitat for wildlife. Not only will the animals be back on the land, but the plants will grow. It means the carbon monoxide will reduce and create a comfortable living environment.

### ***Keeping the Forest and Its Vegetation***

Keeping the forest is one of the potential ways to rewild nature. Expanding woodland cover and restoring biodiversity is an excellent prospect (Broughton et al., 2022). Forests play a crucial role in mitigating climate change. It is needed to store and sequester carbon. Managing forests can store carbon and reduce the impacts of climate change (Giffen et al., 2022).

Forests have played a significant role for humans by providing many benefits and natural resources to support human life. Flynn's family has shown that for everything nature has given them, they should repay by not doing bad things that might destroy them. The forest is 'home', a place that produces oxygen that helps people to live should be taken care of.

The other quotation that emphasizes forests belong to nature and all forests are human homes that should be taken care of by everyone is depicted in the quotation below:

Nevertheless, he said once those forests are all of our homes, no matter where in the world, and that is what I was hoping for, that this knowledge lived somewhere too deep to misplace (p.50).

Flynn's dad has kept the remaining tree since he was twenty-five. Many trees have been lost because people keep cutting the trees down. The Douglas tree is the most known in their hometown in Australia. He said that ninety-nine percent of old-growth Douglas firs have been cut down. Thus, now he keeps the last one, as in the quotation below:

Alexander Flynn, at twenty-five, got out his green tape and marked the tree a second time, this time to "keep." And so ended his career. "I left work that day and I never went back," Dad said. "Too late. Far too late." He gazed out at the stumps. "It's a threatened species now. Ninety-nine percent of old-growth Douglas firs have been cut down. Which makes this one of the last of its kind." (p.11)

The Scottish Highlands also has a protected forest named Caledonian Forest. It is home to some species, including the pine marten, capercaillie, and Scottish wildcat. Flynn understands that keeping this forest is crucial to protect the natural habitat and support those species. She meets Mrs. Doyle, a longtime volunteer in Scotland, and asks about rewilding Scotland. She said she and her team started to plant native plants such as Caledonian pines. It is shown in the quotation below:

"In any case, we started getting back on track and began to plant the natives and reintroduce the poor lost animals. There were the beavers, to start. I hear now down south the landowners are paying to have the critters on their land, they love them so much. And soon enough we'll head up far north to the flow country." (p.133).

Planting native trees is also essential to rewild nature. As the native trees come from Scotland, they will naturally and quickly adapt to the local environment. It will help to restore the water supply. It also preserves the balance of local ecology in Scotland.

### ***Finding Places to Grow Plants***

Plants provide food and shelter for all human beings. Plants are also needed because it stabilizes soil and absorbs carbon dioxide. Based on the novel, deforestation has occurred in the Scottish Highlands, and it has profoundly impacted the ecosystem. Thus, they must restore the natural habitats, including growing native plant species. It is essential to restore nature to its natural state.

Evan, a botanist and Flynn's scientist friend shows Flynn to the hillside. They did a small survey to grow plants. Evan has been liaising with the botanist consultants, independently

running the survey. They need the survey to inform and report it to the government. It is stated in the quotation below:

The first thing Evan did when I arrived in Scotland a few weeks ago was bring me to this hillside. It is the chosen spot for the vegetation survey that will eventually inform our report to the government. (p.15).

The quotation above shows that Inti and Evan want to do their best to rewild the Scottish Highlands. Not only by releasing wolves, they also try to find places to grow plants. The more plants they grow, the more benefits they will get. Moreover, surveying places will help them to know where is the best place to grow vegetation.

A flagship of a rewilding effort named 'Trees for Life' also tries to plant more trees in Scotland. They also do the rewilding project. They have planted a million trees. They will have another volunteer for tree planting. However, not all of them can thrive because deer eat them. Thus, this team supports Flynn's team to rewild nature by releasing the wolves because it helps to control the herbivores. If the herbivores are under control, the trees will grow and help the ecosystem back. The evidence is provided in the quotation below:

Next the conversation turns to the Dundreggan estate, west of here near Loch Ness, a flagship rewilding effort by the charity Trees for Life. Mrs. Doyle, as it turns out, is a longtime volunteer and is headed there tomorrow for the next phase of tree planting (p. 133).

The charity organization also did its best to rewild nature and planted more trees than Flynn's team. However, because the deer population is still overflowing, the trees they have planted did not grow. The deer eat them all.

### **The Impact of Human Interferences that Affect the Nature Environment**

Based on the novel, several good impacts affect nature, animals, and humans in the Scottish Highlands, as in the following data:

#### ***The Impacts on Animal***

By releasing wolves, the rewilding project in Scottish Highlands has returned to its natural state. The impacts happen slowly. However, in the novel, it is portrayed that the rewilding process by releasing wolves is a success. The wolves have their territories. They feel comfortable after some time. Inti and her scientific team have succeeded in helping the wolves create a safe and comfortable place to live in, as it is depicted in the following citation:

The wolves have all begun to howl. They call by night and day, running circuits of their newly established territories, calling to each other to define the boundaries of their pack's land, calling to other wolves a warning to stay away. They make homes here, creating maps they will pass on for generations (p.106).

From the above quotation, it is clear that the wolves have already felt comfortable in the Scottish Highlands. They make homes, create their territories, and are even ready to breed for the next generation. The scientists' rewilding efforts have proved that providing an appropriate habitat will make wolves feel closely possible to their wild counterparts.

Another proof that releasing wolves is successful is that the wolves start to grow bigger. They also start to get their sexual maturity and are ready to find their mates. Since then, they become stronger than before. Scottish Highlands is the perfect place for them to grow and live. The evidence is quoted in the quotation below:

The Tanar Pack, to the east, has staked out the largest territory and its three yearlings have grown to full size and sexual maturity, meaning they may also leave to find mates of their own. But for the moment, the pack of five wolves is intent on hunting together and have proven themselves the most harmonious pack in this respect, with no challenges to dominance. They give me hope, the Tanar Pack, because they are hunting and growing strong, meaning the conditions of the Scottish Highlands have been good to them (p.106)

Based on the quotation above, it is clear that the wolves have adapted well in the Scottish Highlands. Their growth indicates that they are comfortable with the Scottish environment. Tanar Pack has become the best wolves' territory to grow and hunt the overpopulated deer.

### ***The Impact Toward Nature***

As time passes, the rewilding process is still running as it should. The Scottish Highlands has become a beautiful place to go. As the season has changed, the hills also changed its color. The deer and wolves coexist in beautiful Scottish hills. Wolves still hunt them as before, and the population of deer can be controlled. The locals are also accustomed to the presence of wolves, as in the quotation below:

It is spring now, and the hills have changed color. The deer are on the move. Things are growing again. The wolves have come home. And by some miracle, or perhaps it is simply the natural way, the people of this land are becoming accustomed to them (p.185)

The quotation above shows that nature has changed. Even though not a very big change, it indicates that rewilding can be an alternative to bringing back nature into its state. As the wolves can adapt to the environment in Scotland and grow more significantly, they help to reduce the overpopulated deer.

### ***The Impact on Human***

In the novel, it is stated that the deer are considered overabundant. The fourteen wolves have tried to help nature back. As a result, Inti and her daughter can see the new growth. She is happy that her daughter can run freely through the heather, enjoying the beautiful Scottish Highlands landscape. She realizes that she still has more forests to save. She knows that the rewilding project does not stop here, and she will try her best to continue the project by doing meaningful things like saving the forests, as in the quotation below:

I pull her from the sling so she can run freely through the heather. She laughs, as in love with the wilderness as I have ever been. She was born here, and is bound deeply. Even if we leave—there are other forests to save, other wolves to return home, the trembling giant has been calling—a part of her will always belong here (p.185).

Everybody around the Scottish Highlands can feel the impact of rewilding. Due to the scientists' hard work to release wolves, protect forests, and plant trees, now they can live and breathe in the marvelous land's air. Although the ecosystem slowly starts to return to its natural state, Inti is still determined to continue her dedication to nature. She will keep the forests because she knows that humans belong to nature.

In sum, rewilding can be started as an effortless thing. If releasing predators is hard, people can try by doing small movements such as keeping the forests and planting trees or growing flowers in the yard.

## **CONCLUSION**

After analyzing the depiction of human interferences to rewild nature in *Once There Were Wolves*, the researcher concludes that there are several ways to rewild nature. It was first releasing fourteen grey wolves into the wilderness. Releasing wolves will help nature return to its natural state. Wolves hunt the overpopulated deer that destroy the plants' shoots, which makes plants die—second, keeping the forests and their vegetation. Keeping the forests will help to stabilize the oxygen and minimize carbon dioxide. The last is finding places to grow plants. Everybody can start to take small steps to grow wildflowers or the other vegetation in the yard needed to maintain the world's oxygen.

The three human interferences that are depicted in the novel also have some impacts on nature. The wolves start to grow bigger and breed. Thus, the deer population is slowly decreasing and making the ecosystem better. Scottish Highlands has become a beautiful place

to go—nature slowly back into its state. Even though the rewilding project succeeded, keeping forests is everybody's responsibility because humans belong to nature.

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