

NATURE'S POWER AND HUMAN VULNERABILITY IN SAKI'S *THE INTERLOPERS*: AN ECOCRITICAL APPROACH

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Abstract

This research employed the lens of ecocriticism, which explored the intricate relationship between humans, culture, and the environment depicted in the novel. Through a qualitative descriptive approach, this research delved into the narrative intricacies of *The Interlopers*, emphasizing the insignificance of human conflicts in the face of nature's might. By advocating for an ecocritical perspective, the study aimed to promote awareness of environmental issues and advocate for more sustainable and ethical interactions with nature. Through a comprehensive literature review, the paper situated *The Interlopers* within the broader context of ecocritical discourse, elucidating its contribution to understanding the complexities of human-nature relationships in literature. Ultimately, this research shed light on the profound implications of human actions on the environment, urging for a paradigm shift towards greater harmony and stewardship of nature. The research showed the power dynamics between humanity and nature, revealing how human greed and hostility interacted with the formidable forces of the natural world. Furthermore, it underscored the evolution of enmity between conflicting parties, highlighting the detrimental consequences of perpetual feuds fueled by arrogance and territorial disputes.

Keywords— ecocriticism, human-nature, revenge rivalry

Introduction

The Interlopers explores themes of rivalry, revenge, and human fallibility, including arrogance and pettiness. These themes manifest through territorial disputes, vendettas spanning generations, and a lack of reconciliation even during the most challenging circumstances. The critical lens of ecocriticism is applied to this short story, examining the intricate interplay between humans, culture, and the physical environment depicted within the narrative. Ecocriticism aims to heighten awareness of nature and the environment, emphasizing the immense power of nature juxtaposed with human tendencies towards arrogance and pettiness. It advocates for adopting a more sustainable and ethical approach towards nature.

Ecocriticism represents a contemporary approach to understanding the relationship between humans and nature, centered around the Earth and grounded in physical realities. This paper seeks to unveil the spiritual dimensions inherent in both human beings and nature, asserting that acknowledging these spiritual elements is essential for fostering a genuine connection between humanity and the natural world. By recognizing this profound reality, it becomes possible to resolve the often contentious relationship between humans and nature, thereby contributing to global peace, stability, and development (Chitrakar, 2021).

One of the primary objectives of Eco-Criticism is to analyze how individuals within society interact with and respond to nature and ecological phenomena. It prompts a deep examination of the complex relationship between humans and the natural world, grappling with ethical and aesthetic dilemmas posed by environmental crises in language and literature

(Kamalam & Thomas, 2022).

Throughout history, the relationship between humanity and nature has been a contentious issue. Due to humanity's degraded perspectives and mechanistic attitudes towards nature, viewing it merely as a passive backdrop, nature has begun displaying severe signs of stress. There is often a lack of community effort to address the underlying causes of environmental problems. Ecocriticism endeavors to rectify this by applying ecological principles to literary analysis, placing nature at the forefront of scholarly inquiry. As Glotfelty & Fromm state that ecocriticism involves examining the intricate relationships between literature and the environment (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996)

Literature Review

Ecocriticism delineates nature and human behavior toward it at a certain time in the history of literature. The study of the link between literary and physical settings is known as Ecocriticism. Ecocriticism is a literary approach that focuses on the environment. Through literary works, ecocriticism tries to bring attention to the need to reassess man's connection with his environment (Singh, 2019).

Even human weakness is able to become strength if it is fully obeyed the laws of nature and society through creative labor that transforms external into internal strength. The correspondent of outer and inner forces helps to sustain life. If humans are the subject making history, they reform the natural world and produce society; in other words, their practical power and capacity before the object with which it is produced are manifested. This capacity is human's internal force, strength acquired from humans themselves is the determination and consciousness; however, determination and consciousness are only revealed in certain conditions through practical activities, and human existence is its vitality in relation to the object (Quoc, Tri, Dung, Lam, & Hoang, 2020).

According to Buell (1996), ecocriticism in English literature has seen two distinct waves, with the subject trend still in its early stages. The first wave focused on nature writing, pastoral poetry, wilderness romance, and the foundational principles of realism, logocentrism, and historicism. This phase aimed at restoring a wild and natural (non-human) environment. In contrast, the second wave of Ecocriticism broadened its scope beyond the initial focus. It incorporated an activist dimension and expanded its subject matter to include suburban, agricultural, and heavily managed wild spaces. Unlike the first wave, which primarily emphasized pristine wilderness, second-wave Ecocriticism considered a wider range of environmental contexts, including more human-altered landscapes. A similar shift has been agreed upon by Mabie (2016) arguing that postcolonial ecocriticism has recently gained popularity. With the rise of postcolonial Ecocriticism, there has been a larger interest in postcolonial literature. The postcolonial tranche ecocriticism has emphasized the concerns of starving, dehydrated, banished, homeless, ill, and imprisoned people all across the world (Mabie, 2016).

Ecocritic generally examines the relationship between writers, texts, and the world. Ecocritic takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies. The application of ecology in literary studies has a great benefit in exploring the relationship between humans and the environment (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996) and (Garrard, 2004).

Ecocriticism explores the intricate dynamics between humans and non-humans, requiring the integration of various relevant theories from literary, ecological, and cultural studies. Glotfelty and Fromm (1996) assert that the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment [demonstrating] an earthcentered approach to literary studies. Similarly, Oppermann asserts that ecocriticism must analyze the textual strategies of literary works to develop an ecological discourse on human interactions with other forms of life (Oppermann, 2006). Literary complexity, as Endraswara suggests, arises from human interactions within various ecological contexts (Endraswara, 2016). In line with these idea, Garrard also argues that ecocriticism as the study of the relationship between humans and the non-human, spanning human cultural history and involving critical analysis of the term 'human' itself. Ecocriticism evaluates texts and ideas in relation to environmental issues (Garrard, 2004).

In *The Interlopers*, the dense forest serves as a symbol of untamed wilderness, catalyzing the characters' conflict and eventual reconciliation. The natural world in literature often functions as both setting and character, influencing human actions and moral decisions (Slovic, 2013).

Ecocriticism provides a framework to analyze human-nature interaction, as portrayed in Saki's work. In "The Interlopers," the feud between the von Gradwitzes and the Znaeysms over land ownership reflects the human desire to dominate nature. The forest setting underscores the primal conflict between the characters and their environment. Ecocriticism illuminates the relationship between humans and the natural world, bridging conventional attitudes and human life's conceptualization. As Shoba posits out that ecocriticism is the study of culture in relation to humans and nature, offering insights into human habits within environmental contexts (Shoba & Nagaraj, 2013).

Research Method

This research employs a descriptive qualitative method to investigate the roles of literature in environmental conservation. It aims to assess the nature and circumstances of visible environmental conservation characteristics (Busetto, Wick, & Gumbinger, 2020). Data collection involves a documentary study, wherein the literary work under the research was read and observed to identify discussed problems, classify data related to environmental conservation, and describe the findings. Furthermore, the study focuses on the human approach within the context of environmental conservation, assuming a relationship between literary works and the environment. Ecocriticism serves as a guiding framework to analyze the relationship between human conflicts and the power of nature, with the ultimate goal of raising awareness about the importance of nature conservation and preservation of other creatures.

Results and Discussion

The subsequent data presents the pervasive exploitation of nature depicted in Saki's short story, *The Interlopers*. The discussion illuminates the intricate ways in which human characters exploit and interact with the natural environment, shedding light on broader themes of environmental degradation and human-nature conflict within the narrative.

In *The Interlopers*, human interactions extend beyond mere relationships with each other, encompassing intricate connections with the natural world, plants, and animals. As Shoba asserts that ecocriticism delves into the cultural nexus between art, literature, and scientific theory, illuminating the profound disparity between human capabilities and the formidable forces of nature. While humans rely on nature for sustenance and survival, they often underestimate its power. Natural disasters serve as stark reminders of humanity's vulnerability and the consequences of environmental arrogance (Shoba & Nagaraj, 2013).

The animosity between Ulrich and George epitomizes this dynamic relationship, culminating in a climactic struggle within the forest. Despite their rivalry, it is not their physical altercation but the forest's wrath that determines the outcome. The merciless storm and the forest's unforgiving terrain prove to be formidable adversaries, overpowering the men's territorial ambitions. The forest, once a coveted symbol of dominance, becomes a relentless force of nature, indifferent to human desires.

This poignant interaction underscores the delicate balance between human ambition and nature's resilience. The forest, once a contested battleground, becomes a poignant symbol of the interconnectedness of all life forms and the consequences of unchecked greed. Excessive exploitation of natural resources not only jeopardizes the environment but also threatens the survival of all living beings, including humans and the diverse array of wildlife that call the forest home.

"And before the moment of hesitation had given way to action a deed of Nature's own violence overwhelmed them both. A fierce shriek of the storm had been answered by a splitting crash over their heads, and ere they could leap aside a mass of falling beech tree had thundered down on them. Ulrich von Gradwitz found himself stretched on the ground, one arm numb beneath

him and the other held almost as helplessly in a tight tangle of forked branches, while both legs were pinned beneath the fallen mass. His heavy shooting-boots had saved his feet from being crushed to pieces, but if his fractures were not as serious as they might have been, at least it was evident that he could not move from his present position till someone came to release him. The descending twig had slashed the skin of his face, and he had to wink away some drops of blood from his eyelashes before he could take in a general view of the disaster. At his side, so near that under ordinary circumstances he could almost have touched him, lay Georg Znaeym, alive and struggling, but obviously as helplessly pinioned down as himself. All round them lay a thick- strewn wreckage of splintered branches and broken twigs". (Saki, 1993: 2)

The passage vividly portrays the overwhelming force of nature as a "deed of Nature's own violence" that overtakes the characters. This aligns with ecocritical themes of nature's power and agency, emphasizing how the natural world can exert its force over human endeavors. The "fierce shriek of the storm" and the "mass of falling beech tree" symbolize nature's unpredictability and destructive potential, highlighting the insignificance of human actions in the face of such forces.

The characters, Ulrich von Gradwitz and Georg Znaeym, are depicted as helpless victims of nature's violence, pinned down by the fallen tree. This illustrates the vulnerability of humans when confronted with the raw power of the natural world. Their struggle for survival amidst the "thick-strewn wreckage" of branches and twigs underscores the fragility of human existence in the face of natural disasters.

The characters' predicament, trapped beneath the fallen tree, symbolizes the interconnectedness of humans and nature. They are at the mercy of the forest, unable to escape its grasp. This highlights the reciprocal relationship between humans and the natural world, where human actions can have profound consequences on the environment, and nature, in turn, can exert its influence over human lives.

The imagery of the "wreckage of splintered branches and broken twigs" suggests environmental degradation caused by the storm. This can be interpreted as a commentary on the consequences of human exploitation and destruction of natural resources, leading to environmental disasters. It reflects ecocritical concerns about human impact on the environment and the need for stewardship and respect for nature.

Overall, through the lens of ecocriticism, the passage highlights the themes of nature's power, human vulnerability, interconnectedness of humans and nature, and the consequences of environmental degradation depicted in *The Interlopers*. It prompts readers to reflect on humanity's relationship with the natural world and the need for harmony and respect for the environment.

The Interlopers delves deeply into themes revolving around the omnipotence of nature, humanity's environmental impact, and the repercussions of ecological deterioration. At its core, the narrative unveils a bitter feud between two individuals, Ulrich von Gradwitz and Georg Znaeym, embroiled in a territorial dispute within a dense forest of Eastern Europe. This rivalry becomes emblematic of human avarice and the detrimental fallout of conflict, often culminating in the exploitation and despoilment of natural landscapes.

Central to the story is the forest itself, portrayed as an imposing and untamed entity, indifferent to the petty squabbles of men. Its portrayal underscores the intricate interplay between humans and their environment, serving as a stark reminder of humanity's relentless quest to dominate and exploit nature for personal gain. The characters' relentless pursuit of control over the forest echoes humanity's ongoing struggle for supremacy over the natural world.

The pivotal moment arrives when Ulrich and Georg find themselves ensnared beneath a fallen tree, helpless and injured. This climactic event serves as a poignant metaphor for the consequences of human hubris and the frailty of human existence when confronted with the sheer force of nature. In their vulnerable state, they come to realize the futility of their feud and

the inconsequential nature of their conflict amidst the grandeur of the natural world.

Through the lens of *The Interlopers*, Saki compels readers to contemplate humanity's intricate relationship with the environment and the dire ramifications of our actions. The narrative underscores the imperative of nurturing a deep reverence for nature and fostering symbiotic harmony between humans and the natural world to safeguard the mutual well-being of both realms.

“And what peace there would be among the forester folk if we ended our feud to-night. And if we choose to make peace among our people there is none other to interfere, no interlopers from outside”. (Saki, 1993: 4)

In the lines above, the characters Ulrich von Gradwitz and Georg Znaeym find themselves in a precarious situation, trapped under a fallen beech tree in the dense forest. Despite their bitter feud over land ownership, intensified by generations of conflict between their families, they now confront the immediate threat of nature's violence. The passage begins with one of the characters, Ulrich or Georg, expressing a desire for peace between their families. This sudden change in attitude, prompted by their shared predicament, suggests a moment of reflection and introspection. The forest, which serves as the backdrop for their feud, also becomes the stage for a potential reconciliation. The mention of "forester folk" highlights the deep connection between the characters and their natural environment. Their lives are intertwined with the forest, and any resolution to their conflict would have a significant impact on their community. This underscores the theme of the interconnectedness of humans and nature in the story. The term "interlopers" carries symbolic weight in this context. Traditionally, an interloper refers to an outsider or intruder who disrupts or interferes with existing arrangements. However, in this passage, the absence of interlopers is seen as a positive outcome, suggesting that the resolution of their feud is an internal matter that should not be influenced by external forces.

Overall, the lines quoted above capture the complex relationship between humans and nature, the consequences of human actions on the environment, and the potential for reconciliation and peace amidst the turmoil of human conflict.

Throughout the story, Saki explores the destructive nature of pride and the absurdity of holding onto grudges. As Georg and Ulrich lay injured and helpless, they come to realize the futility of their feud in the face of the greater forces of nature. The forest, depicted as an indifferent and merciless entity, serves as a powerful symbol of the uncontrollable forces that ultimately dictate human fate. Saki's narrative is marked by its suspenseful pacing and unexpected plot twists. The tension between Georg and Ulrich reaches its peak as they contemplate killing each other while trapped beneath the tree. However, just as they are about to act, their plans are thwarted by the arrival of wolves, signaling the ultimate insignificance of their conflict in the grand scheme of things. The resolution of the story is both tragic and ironic, as the men's realization of their shared humanity comes too late. Despite their newfound understanding and willingness to reconcile, they are unable to escape the consequences of their past actions. Saki leaves the ending open to interpretation, inviting readers to ponder the implications of the story's moral lessons.

“I never thought to have wanted to do other than hate you all my life, but I think I have changed my mind about things too, this last half-hour. And you offered me your wineflask ... Ulrich von Gradwitz, I will be your friend”.
(Saki, 1993: 4)

In the lines quoted above, the characters Ulrich von Gradwitz and Georg Znaeym find themselves in a moment of vulnerability and reflection as they lie trapped under a fallen beech tree in the forest. The intensity of their feud, which has spanned generations, begins to soften as they face the reality of their situation together. The first character, presumably Georg, expresses a profound shift in his perspective. He admits to harboring feelings of hatred towards Ulrich for most of his life, a sentiment that has been fueled by the longstanding conflict between their families. However, the dire circumstances they find themselves in prompt him to reconsider his

feelings. This transformation in Georg's mindset highlights the power of adversity to challenge deeply ingrained beliefs and prejudices. Georg's acknowledgment that he has changed his mind about their feud signifies a moment of personal growth and introspection. It suggests a willingness to let go of past grievances and embrace the possibility of reconciliation. This theme of reconciliation is further emphasized by Georg's offer to become Ulrich's friend. The gesture of offering his wineflask symbolizes an act of goodwill and camaraderie in the face of adversity. It signifies a willingness to set aside differences and extend a hand of friendship. The use of the wineflask, a symbol of hospitality and shared experience, underscores the potential for human connection and understanding even in the midst of conflict. Ulrich's acceptance of Georg's offer further reinforces the theme of reconciliation and mutual understanding. Despite the animosity that has defined their relationship for so long, Ulrich recognizes the significance of Georg's gesture and responds with openness and willingness to reconcile.

The Interlopers serves as a cautionary tale about the destructive power of human hatred, showcasing how nature can act as an impartial force that punishes those who seek to dominate it. The story emphasizes themes of futility in seeking revenge, the insignificance of human conflicts in the face of nature's power, and the ultimate downfall brought about by greed and inherited animosity. *The Interlopers* reflects human nature which is often caught in a never-ending cycle of revenge. He highlights how Saki used this conflict to highlight the ignorance and violence that continues to be passed down from generation to generation.

The Interlopers also depicts the irony of fate, where the two characters finally realize their folly when they are trapped under a fallen tree, waiting for help that never comes. This shows that the cycle of revenge only results in destruction and sadness.

"Lying here to-night thinking I've come to think we've been rather fools; there are better things in life than getting the better of a boundary dispute". This dialogue reflects the change in their thinking that occurred amidst a difficult situation and highlights the theme of reconciliation and new understanding between the two characters. We fight this quarrel out to the death, you and I and our foresters, with no cursed interlopers to come between us. Death and damnation to you, Ulrich von Gradwitz." (Saki, 1993: 4)

The lines quoted above reveal the characters' evolving relationship with nature and its influence on their attitudes and behaviors. The dialogue reflects a significant shift in the characters' perspectives, particularly in their attitudes towards the longstanding feud between their families. The phrase "there are better things in life than getting the better of a boundary dispute" suggests a realization of the futility and triviality of their conflict in the grand scheme of things. This shift in thinking can be attributed to their shared experience of being trapped under a fallen tree in the forest, a situation that forces them to confront their mortality and reconsider their priorities.

From an ecocritical perspective, this change in mindset can be interpreted as a recognition of the interconnectedness between humans and nature. The forest, with its overwhelming power and indifference to human conflicts, serves as a catalyst for the characters' introspection and self-reflection. The dire circumstances they find themselves in prompt them to reevaluate their relationship with the natural world and their role within it. The mention of "no cursed interlopers to come between us" further emphasizes the characters' desire to resolve their conflict on their own terms, without interference from external forces. This can be seen as a rejection of human intervention in natural processes and a reaffirmation of the characters' connection to their environment.

Ultimately, the lines underscore the transformative power of nature and its ability to foster reconciliation and new understanding between humans. The characters' newfound appreciation for the value of life and the insignificance of their feud in the face of nature's might highlights the themes of harmony, interconnectedness, and humility that are central to ecocritical discourse.

Conclusion



In Saki's *The Interlopers*, the narrative delves into the complex interplay between humans and the natural world, revealing the pervasive exploitation of nature and its profound implications for both individuals and the environment. Through an ecocritical lens, the story vividly portrays the overwhelming power of nature, underscoring humanity's vulnerability amidst its formidable forces. The forest setting, depicted as a relentless and indifferent entity, serves as a poignant backdrop to the characters' bitter feud, symbolizing the interconnectedness between humans and their environment. The characters' shared predicament underlines the fragile balance between human ambition and nature's resilience, prompting moments of introspection and reconciliation amidst the turmoil of conflict. Despite their entrenched animosity, the characters' confrontation with the destructive forces of nature fosters a newfound appreciation for the interconnectedness of all life forms and the imperative of fostering harmony between humans and the natural world. As readers witness the characters grapple with the insignificance of their feud in the face of nature's might, they are compelled to reflect on humanity's relationship with the environment and the urgent need for responsible stewardship. The story serves as a poignant reminder of the transformative power of nature and the potential for reconciliation amidst human adversity, urging readers to reevaluate their attitudes towards the natural world and embrace a more sustainable and respectful coexistence with the environment.

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