

# Environmental Apocalypse in Rudolf Anaya's *Devil Deer*: An Eco-critical Reading

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## Abstract

*This article addresses the issue of increasingly outspoken about environmental problems in American Southwest as portrayed in Rudolf Anaya's Devil Deer. Impact of toxicity in the environment and the health of flora and fauna are some of the serious issues. Likewise, with the establishment of Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL)-national's military industrial complex, the radioactive rays and carcinogenic chemicals through LANL which spread toxicity that has contaminated all the beings. The natural healthy, robust beings have become poisonous, and like mutilated devil. To the flora and fauna the traditional autumn hunting "ritual" of Chicanos community has been also disrupted. From the eco-critical perspective, it is injustice to all the living creatures and plants by the acts of humans. Because of the human's mastery exploitation, environmental apocalypse has taken place. Besides, plants as well as all living creatures are in en-dangerous situation since people are supposed to be the master of environment. Their hegemony, subjugation, exploitation are greatly on the nature so that the direct effect has been seen in the buck as depicted in the text. This article is a contribution to the existing knowledge on the perilous impact of human carelessness on the entire ecological system.*

**Key Words:** Toxicity, flora and fauna, exploitation, radioactive rays, carcinogenic chemicals, apocalypse

## Introduction

The paper analyzes Rudolf Anaya's *Devil Deer* to investigate into the problems caused by human acts in the lap of nature. How the entire ecological system is disturbed by the human acts is the primary venture of this article. Anaya is the father of Chicano Literature and leading figure in the literary movement forged by Chicanos in the 1970s. Anaya gained recognition in his mythopoetic field as the late 1960's Chicano movement gained strength. This paper discusses the co-relationship between human and nature by *applying* eco-criticism perspective, following the insight of Lawrence Buell's *Environmental Apocalypticism*. In the story, the young hunter Cruz shoots a buck inside the fence around the Los Alamos National Laboratory and finds it is terribly deformed. He brings the carcass home, but the old men of his town take it away to burn it. Cruz kills the buck in the forbidden land. He sees the deer that has been poisoned and deformed by a sort of a black magic. The radiation of Los Alamos Labs, the beautiful landscape has been poisoned as well, and how perhaps the life of the hunter is also threatened.

Eco-criticism is a unique contemporary literary and cultural theory because it has a close relationship with the science of ecology. It also defines ecology as the relation of plants

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and living creatures to each other and to their environment. Every living being interacts with other living beings and physical surroundings. All living beings in the world are interdependent. Similarly, human beings depend on nature for good air, water, food and shelter etc. Nature depends on human beings in numerous respects, mainly for its own protection from artificial hazards. Overall, there is a symbiotic relationship between human beings and nature, which must be internalized by the humans who are sheltering in the lap.

### **Methodology**

The paper has employed Lawrence Buell's perspective on *Environmental Apocalypse* and *Toxic Discourse* as a theoretical insight to analyze text. Buell defines toxic discourse as a mode of writing that expresses "anxiety arising from a perceived threat of environmental hazard" (30-31). Fictional works from the Chernobyl and Fukushima nuclear accidents feature characters that appear to be mentally unstable because of this anxiety. Rather than their insanity discrediting them in the eyes of the nuclear industry, this presentation draws inspiration from Buell to consider how lunacy can be used by victims of nuclear disasters to claim authority through toxic discourse by crafting narratives of resistance.

Buell states that the fear of a poisoned world is being increasingly pressed, debated, debunked, and reiterated from many disciplinary vantage points: medicine, political science, history, sociology, economics, and ethics among others. Toxic discourse challenges traditional understandings of what counts as an environmentalist movement or ethos. It calls for a new history of U.S. environmentalism that would place the wilderness preservationist John Muir and the urban social reformer Jane Addams in the same narrative. It insists on the interdependence of eco-centric and anthropocentric values. It focuses that environmentalism must make concerns for human and social health more central and salient than it traditionally has if it is to thrive, perhaps even to survive.

### **Discussion**

When analyzing *Devil Deer*, the paper underscores the representation of nature as object in relation to the presence of humans. She utilizes the contradictory forces of humans and nature as the driving force of the story. While the hunter Cruz was considering the signals that the environment was sending him, his thought process shifted towards his particular needs as well as his obligations towards his family. This was a demonstration of the nature/culture dichotomy discussed. Buell states, "almost every claim that a risk is present, almost every attribution of cause, [has] been vigorously contested... [i]t is notoriously hard to demonstrate environmental causation of illness, given the limitation of preexisting research bases..." (660). If environment is poisonous, different kinds of body problems can be seen. "Cruz slumped against the steering wheel. His body ached: he stretched. It wasn't good to hunt alone. He thought, then instantly tried to erase the thought. He stepped out to urinate" (489). Cruz is a major character, who has gone for the autumn hunting in Los Alamos, New Mexico. There are two laboratories in the US where the nuclear weapons have been undertaken. And because of that, there environment has been changed into poisonous ones. Therefore when Cruz reached at the Los Alamos, New Mexico then he

has also got the problems of body ache, stepped out to urinate, and so on. And he thought that, he was unable to hunt alone. It has happened because of the poisonous environment. Even the days have been changed into darkly, and feel uneasy for the respiration. Cruz has seen physical problems owing of toxic impact.

US-led coalition forces, the Iraqi military, and insurgent groups have also produced toxicities through their destruction of industrial sites and oil infrastructure, as well as urban bombing (Kellay94–98). Because of radioactive rays and carcinogenic chemicals through 'LANE' the environment of Los Alamos New Mexico has become healthy resulting into different types of health problems related to the animals too. "The deer was deformed. One paw was twisted like an old tree root, the other was missing. The legs were gnarled, and the huge animal walked like an old man with arthritis"(488). It is brilliantly mentioned that, the impact of toxicity on the health of animals life. It also equally shows that how life is suffocated, and how radioactive rays and carcinogenic chemicals have made the environment poisonous. Similarly the body of the animals twisted like an old tree root and the legs like gnarled, the huge animals walked like an old man this all happened because of PCB, PBB (Poisonous chemicals) which is seeping into the earth, seeping into the animals of the forest. Ecologically, it is the injustice to the other living beings by the so called master 'Man'. In the name of development, as well as being atomic powerful the so called master have been exploiting nature as much as they can. They don't care about their future generations along the present environment. In this story, an indigenous community readies for an annual deer hunt in the mountains surrounding the government-funded lab that specializes in national security and nuclear fusion. Therefore, Anaya has been aware of the menacing situation in the essay. Because of human's activities, animal's husbandry has been in the mode of crises. Not only the animals but also the humans are also equally affected due to the cause of poisonous environment:

Cruz stood frozen. The bear was deformed. One paw was twisted like an old tree root, the other was missing. The legs were gnarled. And the huge animal walked like an old man with arthritis. The face was deformed, the mouth dripping with saliva. Only the eyes were clear as it looked at Cruz. Go away, it said. Go away from this place. Not even the medicine of your grandfathers can help you here. (487)

The environment of Los Alamos Countries, New Mexico, and United States is unstable. It seems frozen at the same time; it happens hot, it is because of environmental apocalypse. Even the big animals like bear couldn't walk properly. Their body seems like given anesthesia. In the absence of nature, no living beings do have easy life. For instance, life in the city is characterized by chaos, agony and worried situations it is because of the lack of healthy environment. Ecocriticism has been premised on the assumption that the texts it studies have a significant impact on readers and the world at large. In her introduction to the seminal *Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), Cheryl Glotfelty asserted that one of the typical questions posed by ecocritics is "How do our metaphors of the land influence the way we treat it?" (23). In cities there are many kinds of factory which kills the purity cum virginity of the pure nature. We should be careful about the use of nature. We need not to think that,

we are the master of the nature, and the nature is just for the human beings not for any others beings but quite distinctly, we need to think that we humans are also a part of nature. There is equal right for all the living creatures in the nature, so that there is no master and slave in the nature. In a distinct point, nature is a symbol of peace and harmony. If the worried life of the city dominates nature, humankind will become troubled, and life will become meaningless. If people realize the importance of nature, it will offer them a harmonious life. Life becomes lifeless, if there is no good nature.

In "Devil Deer," Anaya informs audience on nuclear weapons and their effects on the environment. The central character of the story, Cruz, comes across a deformed "devil deer" near a top-secret weapons laboratory at Los Alamos. "The laboratory, which may Kanellisrepresent the nation's military-industrial complex, is blamed for not only contaminating the environment but also breaking the chain of family tradition, the hunting culture that has been passed from generation to generation" (Rudolfo 487). The devil deer may be a fictional victim, but Anaya's creation of it expresses his anxiety over the secret lab that, from his perspective, prioritizes nuclear technology over environmental conservation. This imposition, eco-imperialist in nature, will force the Indigenous community to reconsider or even abandon traditional hunting practices and depend more on Western ways of life, such as buying processed food at supermarkets. Anaya has recently become more candid about environment problems, predominantly in the Southwestern United States. David King Dunaway, Anaya says:

The need to be ready for war with nuclear weapons and peacekeeping with no weapons are both different ethical environmental issues that are closely associated with each other. They are hard to balance because of their contradicting characteristics. It is nuclear weapons and threatening hostilities with protection, or no weapons with no security, but peace. It is often very hard to distinguish the accurate approach. (637)

Billions of dollars in assembly and operating new experimental facilities at United States nuclear weapons labs were planned by the Department of Energy (DOE). This program is named SBSS, which stands for Science Based Stockpile Stewardship. The SBSS program is a "basic need" to accomplish national security policies which command a "safe and reliable stockpile with further nuclear testing and aggressive pursuit of enhanced experimental capabilities" (Zerriffi, Hisham, and Arjun Makhijani). In this proposal, the Department of Defense entails the DOE to preserve the ability to construct and attest new weapons. "Devil Deer," gives a powerful message that the very nature of our home is slowly diminishing. We see that the deer have gone scarce from not only over consumption, but the lack of wild life anymore. The end of the story Cruz was deeply affected by his findings, that what he knew best, what he has been taught by the generations before him would alter his cultures history which scared him. Then in Zwingers story, "Upper Grand Gulch," we see a man portrayed as a traveler among the people with little attachments to each place slowly "exhausting local resources," or "putting a heavy strain on them," because again it is what these people know best. At the

end again we see another making pottery because it is what they know to do best and is all that they can do to survive.

Both stories end with the people forced to adapt to their environment, but Anaya's story makes a greater impact because we often let these big business men come in and tear down our green natural land in exchange for cash flow rather than praising the land given and enjoying it. Showing the effect all the radiation had on the buck shows that we could be next. It's not like it hasn't happened before. Rather than just thinking of the environment as trees being cut down, or animals dying off, we must take a look at the bigger picture and see that everything around us is being affected by these changes, whether it is a growing population in Zwingers story or not. We are quickly exhausting our resources leaving only room for experimental projects that only cause harm. Our relationship to the natural world is a bond that cannot be broken; because without our forests and natural life we would cease to exist, until we find another alternative, until then we can only dream of a more sustainable life here on earth. In the same lineage, when Cruz has shot the buck, it was trembled and lying on the jungle then Cruz has cut the neck, but suddenly, he saw that the drain blood. Then he is shocked:

The buck toppled on its side and Cruz rushed forward to cut its throat and drain its blood. When he knelt down to lift the animal's head he stopped. The deer was deformed. The hide was tom and bleeding in places. And a green bile seeped from the holes the bullets had made. The hair on the antlers looked like mangy, human hair and the eyes were TWO white stones mottled with blood. The buck was blind. (490)

After the death of the buck, Cruz found that, the buck is blind, hair like mangy, eyes like white stones mottled with blood. This is all because of industrial chemical reaction which makes environment poisonous and the effect has seen to the animals. We human beings must be aware about the environment; otherwise the life of any kinds of animal would be in critical situation. The following lines also indicating same meaning, Like "What happened?" Joe asked. Cruz motioned to the back of the truck. Joe flashed the light on the buck. It was an ugly sight which made him recoil. "Oh God." he whispered. He whistled, and other shadows appeared in the dark. Neighbors who had seen Cruz's truck drive in. The men looked at the buck and shook their heads" (491). Even the title projects that the good, fresh Deer has changed into Devil Deer. It is because of human's activities. They never think about the depredate situation of environment.

Besides, we need to preserve the nature; we need to realize that unlike human beings, nature will never betray 'the heart that loved her'. Hence, if human beings preserve nature from all artificial dangers and all environmental hazards, it will return guard, nurse and guide them. Simultaneously, humans are the supreme easeful animals in world, so we need to be much more careful about the use of nature and its preservation. Apart from it, if we feel the superiority and domination to the nature, hereafter, the major cause for the environmental degradation is that.

When the environment is not supportive, there is a greater chance to erupt through the world, such as dinosaurs. In the same fashion, the decrease of deer population is the cause of poisonous environment. Because of radioactive rays, cum carcinogenic chemical the environment is full of like unhealthy, so the number of animals have been decrease day to day. "Everyone knew the deer population was growing scarce. It was harder and harder to get a buck" (487). Here decrease of deer indirectly signifies the loss of bucolic harmony. We shouldn't commodify the nature, if not we have to be ready to face traumatic, and vagarious situation.

To save and keep the nature, there has been developed many opinions have been developed, some opinions came into theory, like the term eco-criticism was coined by William Rueckert in 1978 in an essay entitled *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Eco-criticism*. According to Greg Garrard (2007), the notion of eco-criticism has proceeded from the belief system derived from Eastern religions such as Taoism and Buddhism, from heterodox figures in Christianity such as St. Francis of Assisi and Teilhard de Chardin, and modern reconstructions of American Indian, pre-Christian Wiccan, Shamanistic and other 'primal' religions (22-23). The theory and the theorists argued that, eco-friendly environment should be created. In the eyes of environment there is no high or low. It is equal to all. Rudolfo suggests the human and their anti-environmental acts to protect nature. It is because, nature is not only for the sake of humans, but it is equal to all living creatures. In the name of development humans can't exploit nature, if humans exploit nature; the direct effect is shown to all the animals including deer.

The article focuses on the acts of human beings who are the members of the land community but not as the conquerors of the ecosphere, biosphere, lithosphere, hydrosphere, geo-sphere and atmosphere. Therefore, their exploitation to the nature is harmful to all the living creatures. So this is the result of decreasing deer. "There's no deer there." (487). "We've never seen a deer like this. the old men would say later" (491). And at the end when Cruz killed the buck and taken to home, at that time people in the village were shocked and would say that, we have never seen such a deer, because the deer seems quite unusual. Eco-criticism's initial project was spelled out by Glotfelty in *The Eco-criticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, "Simply put, eco-criticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (xviii).

Glotfelty goes onto liken eco-criticism to feminist and Marxist literary criticism, in that it examines literature from a particular critical perspective; in this case, an "earth-centered approach" (xviii). Glotfelty asks, "In addition to race, class, and gender, should/j/ace become a new critical category?" (xix). The unusual has seen because of environmental effect. The Los Alamos National Laboratory New Mexico is one of atomic industry which has been destructing the environment, but no people are aware on its poisonous effects. Like, "On the other side of the ridge lay Los Alamos, the laboratories, and nobody knew what in the hell went on there" (489). This feeling of superiority and domination is the major cause for the environmental degradation. The recent growth in concern about environmental issues has made itself felt in many aspects of academic life — an increase

in environmental science courses and social science courses, an increase in humanities courses in such fields as history and philosophy, and rapid growth in the number of ecology and environmental studies programs and schools. Nowhere, however, has this developing cultural interest been more dramatically manifest than in the study of literature.

### Conclusion

The paper has concluded that Anaya shows the way to establish a better world and a better life, and teaches the relationship with nature should be created in order to give birth to a peaceful and harmonious life in the world. He advises to preserve and protect all sentient beings. *Devil Deer* is a typical eco-critical work which strives to promote a relationship between nature and human beings. It also indirectly advises every reader to be eco-friendly and to see how human beings have to behave towards nature, and what the consequences of their anthropocentric attitude towards nature are. It also insists on the need to take proper measures to establish harmony with nature. This is a manifestation of the nature/culture dichotomy. There is an inherent divide between the particular wants of humans and the natural world and this was superbly executed through the portrayal of Cruz' ambiguous emotions. It also demonstrates empathy for the hunter's condition, one of being jarred out of contentment by the harsh realities of the natural world. Cruz "felt no celebration in taking the life of the buck," which signifies a form of personal displacement within him. The study has revealed the true face of humanity and has reflected on the responsibilities for the preservation of nature to retain ecological system.

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