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An Ecofeminist Reading of Ann Pancake's *Strange as this Weather Has Been*: Women as Guardians of the Earth

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Abstract: The present article aims to analyze Ann Pancake's *Strange as this Weather Has Been* through the lens of ecofeminist theories. The study explores the connections between women and nature by focusing on three key areas: inherent affinity and dualism, agency and intrinsic values, and conflict with technology. The article addresses how the novel expresses and upholds ecofeminist concepts and how the female characters challenge the male-dominated power structure by participating in the ecofeminist movement through their actions and words as Earth's guardians. Greta Gaard's ecofeminist ideas form the theoretical foundation of this research. The article highlights how the primary female characters in the novel exhibit a profound bond with their land and work to safeguard it as guardians of the Earth, embodying resilience, empowerment, and an enduring spirit, and manifest self-confidence and a deep connection with nature. Through this affinity, they portray a sense of belonging and identity with nature. It laments that technology, which is manipulated in capitalist and patriarchal ideologies, treats nature merely as a commodity. The narrative also showcases and criticizes the dire environmental and societal consequences of mountaintop removal mining as a harmful technological practice in Appalachia, which, on a macro level, stands for the world.

Keywords: Dualism; Ecofeminism; Inherent Affinity; Intrinsic Value; Ann Pancake; *Strange as this Weather Has Been*.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, environmental crises have received significant attention, especially following incidents like the mercury poisoning in Indonesia in the 1950s, the lead poisoning in the Dominican Republic in 1997, the Bhopal gas tragedy in India in 1984, and the toxic waste dumping in Ivory Coast in 2006. These incidents have deeply influenced the local communities, highlighting the urgency to address environmental degradation through ecocriticism and its subfields, such as ecofeminism. The current study focuses on analyzing Ann Pancake's novel *Strange as this Weather Has Been* as a critical exploration of the interconnectedness between women and nature from an ecofeminist perspective.

Strange as this Weather Has Been is a novel based on the author's personal experiences as she grew up in Appalachia and witnessed the impact of coal mining on the people and the environment. It portrays a coal mining family in West Virginia affected by the mountaintop removal mining. The central character, Lace, is a mother of four children and a descendant of the area's original settlers. She recounts her journey of early motherhood, dropping out of college, and working at a fast-food restaurant. As the story progresses, Lace becomes an activist against the coal company that employed her husband, Jimmy Make, leading to marital conflicts. The novel also delves into the family's hardships, including property damage from floods and the tragic death of their son, Corey, in an accident. The novel ends when Lace and her daughter, Bant, stand firm in their decision to stay on their land despite pressure from Jimmy Make and the coal company.

Ann Pancake is an American author known for her works of fiction set in the Appalachian region of the United States. Born in West Virginia in 1954, Pancake grew up in a family of coal miners and educators. Pancake's writing often explores the complex relationships between people and the natural world, as well as issues of social justice and environmentalism. Her debut novel, *Strange as this Weather Has Been*, which Wendell Berry describes as one of the bravest novels he has ever read, was published in 2007 and was a finalist for the 2007 National Book Award for Fiction. Her other books include *Given Ground* (2001) and *Me and My Daddy Listen to Bob Marley* (2015). Heather Houser in her "Knowledge Work and the Commons in Barbara Kingsolver's and Ann Pancake's Appalachia" (2017) writes "The novels' women protagonists work on rural Appalachian land in response to the threats that privatization and extractive industry pose to ecosystems, cultural traditions, family, and finances" (95). In her "Review," Marianne

Worthington describes it as “brilliant” because “Pancake has fashioned characters, a community, and language so believable that it seems perfectly normal for these characters to step in and work through thorny ideologies in their daily lives” (372).

This study aims to explore the ways the main female characters defy the patriarchal oppressions against both women and nature. The research seeks to address the following questions: How are ecofeminist notions manifested and celebrated by the author of *Strange as this Weather Has Been*? And how do the female characters in the novel resist patriarchal oppression and contribute to the ecofeminist movement? The methodology involves analyzing the narrative, in addition to the female characters and their actions, drawing on insights from the prominent ecofeminist scholar Greta Gaard and others.

In the following pages, “Theoretical Framework: Diverse Interpretations of Ecofeminism” focuses on a range of definitions of ecofeminism suggested by Gaard and other major theorists in the field. “Literature Review” introduces other studies conducted on the novel under study. The analytic section of the article, “Ecofeminist Tendencies in Ann Pancake’s Novel,” is divided into three parts. “Inherent Affinity and Dualism” examines how the novel shows the tie between women and nature due to their shared potentialities and experiences. In addition, it discusses how the novel exposes and criticizes the patriarchal attitudes that create and maintain the domination, dualism, and hierarchy between men and women, and humans and nature. “Agency and Intrinsic Values” investigates the way the novel celebrates the agency and intrinsic values of women and nature, and how they resist and transform the patriarchal system. “Conflict with Technology” analyzes how the novel depicts the conflict between technology and nature, and how it affects both the lives of women and nature in the novel. Finally, the article ends with a brief section titled “Conclusion” which summarizes the findings of the study.

2. Literature Review

There have been other research studies conducted on Ann Pancake’s novel. In “Dislocation, Dismemberment, Dystopia: From Cyberpunk to the Fiction of Wendell Berry and Ann Pancake,” published by *Midwest Modern Language Association* in 2015, Matt Wanat has examined the works of these writers as examples of contemporary discourse on dislocation and dismemberment which is generally typical to dystopian fiction. In his analysis, he concludes that the depiction of bodily dismemberment serves as a metaphor for a broader sense of displacement and states “Pancake’s novel, like Berry’s, is about

figurative dismemberment of the soul alongside actual dismemberment of nature, community, and family” (22).

In “Review,” published by *Appalachian Journal* in 2008, Marianne Worthington summarizes the environmental issue depicted in the novel, analyzes the characters and their responses to the incidents, and labels it as the first fictional portrayal of calamities resulting from mountaintop removal mining. She writes, “Ann Pancake’s novel is one of the first fictional accounts of the catastrophic disasters invoked upon the landscape and its inhabitants by mountaintop removal mining” (377).

In “*Strange as this Weather Has Been: Teaching Laudato Si’ and Ecofeminism*,” published by *Journal of Moral Theology* in 2017, David von Schlichten examines the two works to explore the concept of God. By integrating ecological and theological perspectives, it aims to propose guardianship for nature. Schlichten concludes that “Hurting the environment is sinful in of itself as well as sinful because of the harm it does to the most destitute members of society” (159).

In “Knowledge Work and the Commons in Barbara Kingsolver’s and Ann Pancake’s Appalachia,” published by *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* (2017), Heather Houser compares the two authors’ works in terms of their similar or common concerns. She discusses the profound impact of industrialization and its devastating consequences. She states that “The novels’ women protagonists work on rural Appalachian land in response to the threats that privatization and extractive industry pose to ecosystems, cultural traditions, family, and finances” (95).

In “Discursive Construction of Waste and Slow Violence in Ann Pancake’s *Strange as this Weather Has Been*,” Sara Villamarin Freire addresses the representation of environmental destruction in the Appalachian coalfields. The article has proven its point by “showcasing the narrative techniques used in the novel that undo that waste-ification process” (148). She declares that Pancake’s work reveals the enduring impact of ecological harm and illustrates that those suffering from gradual environmental damage face significant challenges in overcoming their critical circumstances.

3. Theoretical Framework: Diverse Interpretations of Ecofeminism

The ecological crisis brought about by industrialization, modernization, and the growth of market culture has led to the emergence of ecofeminism as a movement. In the first chapter of her book *Women, Life, Animals* (1993), Gaard defines ecofeminism as, “a theory that has evolved from various fields of feminist inquiry and activism: peace movements, labor movements, women’s health care, and the anti-nuclear,

environmental, and animal liberation movements” (1). Ecofeminism was first coined by French writer Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974 in her path-breaking work *Le Féminisme ou la Mort*. However, in “Rediscovering the Link between Women and Nature” Luca Valera expresses his idea of d'Eaubonne's ecofeminism and claims that although creating an innovative term was necessary to rescue both nature and women, “her [d'Eaubonne's] intuition was not integrally innovative: the similarity of the condition of Women and Nature (both denominated Mother) was a theme already present in Greek mythology, for which the Mother par excellence is Gaia (or *Gea*, the Mother Earth), who is generated and auto-generated as the immortal daughter of Chaos” (10). The connection between women and nature as mothers is not only a theoretical concept but also a lived reality for many women across the globe. In less developed countries, women depend on nature for their daily survival and care work. These women are responsible for nurturing and caring for others and are therefore closely connected to nature. In these regions, women's domestic work requires them to rely on nature for resources such as fuel, food, fodder, and water. Deforestation poses a significant problem for women, particularly in rural areas, as it forces them to travel long distances to collect fuel. According to Ruether, “Deforestation means women walk twice and three times as long each day gathering wood; it means drought which means woman walk twice and three times farther each day to find and carry water to their modest houses” (40).

In “The Greening of the Humanities,” Jay Parini asserts that “Environmental studies began in the sciences – geology, biology, meteorology—but it has widened its embrace to include humanities and social sciences” (52). Environmental studies as an academic field can be traced back to the 1950s. The popularity of scientific discussions on ecological issues gave rise to the formation of a new scientific discipline known as Environmental Science, while commonsensical ideas about environmental protection were also circulating in society. These developments ultimately led to the establishment of an independent Ministry of Environment in 1985 in India. Feminists embraced this development and anticipated the rise of a new ecological issue that would resonate with expected identity politics.

Ecofeminism is a term that encompasses a diverse range of viewpoints, orientations, and methods, including both forms of activism and methods of analysis and criticism. Despite this diversity, various academic and activist groups have attempted to discredit or dismiss ecofeminism from its inception. Critics have often grouped all forms of this movement and criticized them based on the characteristics of one particular segment. For example, some have accused ecofeminists of essentialism, which is the belief that

women are inherently closer to nature, or of relying on alternative spirituality as the foundation for their practice. Despite facing resistance, ecofeminist philosophy ultimately succeeded and gained recognition from literary critics and theorists, including those who initially came from either feminism or ecocriticism. According to Gaard, "Ecofeminism calls for an end to all oppressions, arguing that no attempt to liberate women (or any other oppressed group) will be successful without an equal attempt to liberate nature" (1).

In ecofeminism, the theoretical foundation is rooted in a sense of self commonly expressed by women and other marginalized groups, viewing the self as interconnected with all life. Various social activists, including socialists, animal liberationists, ecologists, and feminists, acknowledge the presence of privileged and oppressed groups. The privileged groups are typically upper or middle-class, human, technologically and industrially developed, and male, while the oppressed groups are often the poor, animals, and women. Ecofeminism identifies patriarchy as the framework that enables these forms of oppression; it reflects, therefore, an ideology that establishes a fundamental self/other distinction based on a separate and atomistic sense of self.

4. Ecofeminist Tendencies in Ann Pancake's Novel

Women-nature relationships have been approached in various ways. The primary approach is ecocriticism, which is defined by Cheryl Glotfelty in *The Ecocriticism Reader Landmarks in Literary Ecology* as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (xviii). Other approaches include critical animal studies, challenging the human-animal divide and advocating for animal rights, queer theory, questioning gender and sexuality norms, vegetarianism, promoting a plant-based diet for ethical and environmental reasons, biodiversity, referring to the variety of life on Earth and its importance for ecosystems and more. Noël Strugeon notes, "Ecofeminism as a term indicates a double political intervention, of environmentalism into feminism and feminism into environmentalism" (169). This research explores the main ecofeminist principles in Pancake's novel through the following analytical subheadings: "Inherent Affinity and Dualism," discussing the interconnectedness between women and nature and the significance of Plumwood's dualism concept, "Agency and Intrinsic Value," examining how the novel praises the agency and intrinsic values of women and nature, and "Conflict with Technology," analyzing technology's impact on women and nature in the novel.

4.1. Inherent Affinity and Dualism

One of the main insights of ecofeminism is that women have a unique affinity with nature, stemming from their shared history of oppression, biological and social roles, their cultural representations, and their experiential knowledge. This affinity does not suggest that women are inherently closer to nature than men, or that they have a uniform or homogeneous relationship with nature. Instead, it indicates that women have diverse and intricate ways of relating to nature that are shaped by their material conditions, cultural contexts, personal choices, and political struggles. As Gaard explains in her book titled *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*, “Ecofeminism does not posit a singular or universal ‘women’s experience’ of nature; rather it acknowledges multiple experiences shaped by intersections of gender with race/ethnicity/nation/class/sexuality/ability/species” (3). Moreover, this affinity does not mean that women are passive victims or romanticized icons of nature; rather, it implies that women are active agents and creative subjects who can resist, transform, and celebrate their connections with nature.

Pancake’s novel demonstrates the affinity between women and nature, explained by Gaard, through its main female characters: Lace See and her daughter Bantella (Bant). Lace is a mother of four children residing in a small town in West Virginia. She is married to Jimmy Make See, a coal miner employed by a company practicing mountaintop removal mining. Lace deeply loves her family and her land, yet she grapples with poverty and environmental degradation. She is torn between her loyalty to her husband and community and her anger and grief over the destruction of her home. Bant, a fifteen-year-old girl, is curious, rebellious, and passionate about nature. She also becomes involved in activism against the mining industry and tries to protect her family and her land from harm. Both Lace and Bant have a strong sense of place and a deep attachment to their land. They see their land as a living entity, a source of sustenance, beauty, memory, and identity. They also recognize their land as a victim of violence, a site of resistance, and a potential agent of change. Lace and Bant also witness and experience the devastating effects of mountaintop removal mining on their land and their lives. They witness how the mining blasts destroy the mountains, how the coal slurry pollutes the water, how the dust and noise affect their health, how the floods and landslides endanger their homes, and how the loss of biodiversity and beauty diminishes their spirit. Additionally, they see how the mining industry exploits and divides their community, how it creates a culture of fear and silence, how it erodes their traditions and values, and how it jeopardizes their future. For example, Lace observes:

At first I didn't believe everything they said—how nearly a thousand miles of streams had been filled with the rock and dirt that used to be mountaintops, and how the fill had killed everything there. How what soil was left on the flattened tops was compacted so hard that if anything ever came back besides the grasses and shrubs the company sprayed on, it wouldn't be for at least several hundred more years. (229)

In response to these challenges, Lace and Bant develop different strategies for coping and resisting. Lace tries to balance her roles as a wife, a mother, a worker, and an activist. She supports her husband's job, but she also questions his loyalty to the company. She takes care of her children, but she also encourages them to pursue their dreams. She works as a waitress, but she also joins a group of women who protest against mining. She suffers from depression, but she also finds solace in nature. She thinks:

Sometimes I feel like giving up like there's no hope no point in fighting. But then I see something that reminds me of why I love this place why I can't let it go. A hawk soaring in the sky a deer grazing in the field a flower blooming in the spring. A sunrise painting the mountains pink a sunset setting them on fire. A star shining in the night. (67)

Bant, meanwhile, adopts a more radical and rebellious stance. She rejects her father's job, and she confronts him about his complicity in the mining. She defies her mother's authority, and she runs away from home several times. She falls in love with Dillon, and she follows him to his environmental camp. She participates in direct actions against the mining, such as blocking roads, chaining herself to equipment, and sabotaging machinery. She says:

I'm not afraid of them I'm not afraid of anything. I'm angry, and I'm not going to take it anymore. I'm going to fight for what I believe in, for what I love, for what's right. I'm going to make them pay for what they've done, for what they're doing, for what they're going to do. I'm going to make them stop. (89)

Through these different strategies, Lace and Bant demonstrate their affinity with nature, and their agency as women. They challenge the dualisms that separate humans from nature, culture from nature, reason from emotion, mind from body, male from female, white from nonwhite, and so on. They also challenge the hierarchies that justify the oppression of women and nature, and that privilege certain forms of knowledge, power, and value over others. They show that women and nature are not inferior or subordinate to men or culture, but rather interdependent and equal partners in a complex web of life.

In his article “*Strange as this Weather Has Been: Teaching Laudato Si’ and Ecofeminism*” David von Schilchten contends, “Ecofeminists strive to liberate both nature and women from this oppression, mainly through replacing the patriarchal mindset with one that is less androcentric, anthropocentric, and hierarchical” (160). In Plumwood’s *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993), she also criticizes the dualistic logic of Western culture that separates and hierarchizes humans and nature, reason and emotion, culture and nature, and men and women. She argues that this logic has led to the domination and exploitation of both women and nature and that humans need to develop a more holistic and relational understanding of ourselves and the world. As Morteza Emamqoli Tabar Malakshah has explained:

Dualism puts humankind in a dualist relationship with nature. If male/female, master/slave and mind/body are duals, then humankind/nature also falls under this category. The essence of the relationship between humankind and nature becomes a feminist issue when it is interpreted as a situation in which a masculine force (humankind/man) tries to oppress and metaphorically enslave a feminine force (nature/woman). (124)

One of Plumwood’s main points is that dualism is not just a descriptive concept, but a normative one that implies superiority and inferiority, mastery and subordination. She writes, “Dualism is a term used to describe a type of thinking that sharply separates the sphere of reality it refers to into two opposed, often hostile, sub-spheres or elements which are seen as sharply discontinuous” (41). She further explains that dualism is not a symmetrical relation, but an asymmetrical one that involves three features: backgrounding, radical exclusion, and incorporation. Backgrounding means that one element of the dualism is made invisible or insignificant, while the other is foregrounded or valued. A radical exclusion means that the two elements are seen as completely separate and opposed, with no common ground or overlap. Incorporation means that one element is defined in terms of its difference or lack from the other, which is taken as the norm or standard (42).

Plumwood applies this analysis to various dualisms that structure Western thought and culture, such as mind/body, reason/emotion, human/animal, culture/nature, and male/female. She shows how these dualisms have justified the oppression of women and nature by men and culture, and how they have distorted our understanding of ourselves and our place in the world. She also explores how these dualisms are interconnected and mutually reinforcing, creating a complex system of domination. Plumwood’s aim is not to reverse or dissolve these dualisms, but to challenge their hierarchical structure and to

recognize the value and agency of both elements. She proposes an alternative framework of ecological rationality that respects difference without hierarchy, and that fosters a sense of connection and responsibility between humans and nature. She writes:

The challenge for feminism is to develop forms of reason that can acknowledge dependency on nature without reducing it to passivity or insignificance; which can respect difference without hierarchy; which can foster connection without loss of identity; which can value emotion without devaluing reason; which can affirm life without denying death. (192)

However, Gaard expands this idea of dualism in ecofeminism and writes, “Though some may agree with social ecologists, for example, that the root cause of all oppression is hierarchy, ecofeminists tend to believe hierarchy takes place as a result of the self/other opposition” (3). *Strange as this Weather Has Been* illustrates Gaard’s idea of dualism by showing how the dominant culture views nature as a resource to be exploited, and how the local people are marginalized and oppressed by the same logic:

They brought in all these immigrants to work the mines, Irish, Italians, Hungarians, Poles. They paid them next to nothing and treated them like dirt. They made them live in company towns where they had to buy everything from the company store at inflated prices. They made them work long hours in dangerous conditions. They didn’t care about their health or safety or dignity. They just wanted to get as much coal out of the ground as they could, as fast as they could, as cheap as they could. (75)

This passage reveals how the dominant culture views nature and the local people as exploitable and disposable objects. The dominant culture lacks respect for the intrinsic value or dignity of both nature and the local people and instead treats them as tools to achieve its goals.

4.2. Agency and Intrinsic Values

In her article, “Women and the Environment: Applying Ecofeminism to Environmentally-Related Consumption,” Dobscha explores the ecofeminist perspective on women’s role and responsibility in environmentally-related consumption. She argues that women, as primary caretakers of families and households, are more exposed and vulnerable to the environmental crisis than men. She also suggests that women have a special connection and affinity with nature due to their biological and social functions of giving birth and nurturing life. She writes:

Women have been historically associated with nature because of their ability to give birth to new life. This association has been used by patriarchal societies to justify the domination and exploitation of both women and nature. However, ecofeminists view this association as a source of strength and empowerment for women. They believe that women have a unique contribution to make in the environmental movement because of their experience and knowledge of nature. (341)

Dobscha also reviews existing literature on women's environmental attitudes and behaviors and identifies the challenges and opportunities for marketers who want to target women as green consumers. She concludes by calling for more research on the ecofeminist perspective and its implications for consumer research and public policy.

The novel confirms the viewpoints of most of the well-known ecofeminists that women are invested with a mission to save and nurture nature. Chris Cuomo, an American ecofeminist, claims, "Environmental ethics can benefit by incorporating feminist insights on the limitations of traditional, philosophical conceptions of ethics" (i). In Pancake's novel, one of the most important manifestations of agency refers back to Lace and her daughter, Bant. The way these characters react against the mountaintop removal mining, however, is different from each other. Nevertheless, they are both independent and, despite Lace's perception of Jimmy, can make choices. In the following quotation, Lace expresses her power and autonomy by speaking out against the coal industry that is destroying her environment and community, "I spread the word whenever I could, lots of people didn't really understand what was happening, just like I hadn't, because of how the industry kept it hidden up over our heads" (257). She uses her agency to inform others about the truth of the situation, to challenge the dominant ideology of the industry, and to advocate for a better way of mining that would benefit both the workers and the land. She also demonstrates her agency by resisting the pressure and hostility from her manager and some of the customers who are either ignorant or complicit in the coal industry's practices. She does not accept the fatalistic view that coal is the only option for her place, but instead seeks to create change and awareness through her actions.

In the final chapter of *Strange as this Weather Has Been* Bant decides to stay with her mother although Jimmy takes the sons with him to another place, "The dull roar in my ears. Then something told me that, serious as this was, I should speak to him, too. "I'm staying here, Daddy" (297). According to Dobscha's description of 'agency,' the narrator decides to stay with her mother instead of going with her father, who is leaving the

family. She uses her agency to reject her father's offer, assert her independence, and choose her own path. She also demonstrates her agency by speaking to her father, despite the emotional turmoil and the noise in her ears. She does not follow him out of fear, obligation, or loyalty, but makes a conscious choice according to her own feelings and values.

Another key term is 'intrinsic value' which was coined by Naess, a Norwegian philosopher and environmentalist who developed the deep ecology movement in his book *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle* (11). In her article "Ecofeminism and Wilderness," Gaard emphasizes the intrinsic value of wilderness, which she views as essential to the identity and liberation of marginalized 'others.' She states, "I argue that ecofeminism must be concerned with the preservation and expansion of wilderness," (5) highlighting the wilderness as a counterpoint to the 'Self' of Western culture. Gaard proposes an alternative to the dominant cultural identity: "an ecofeminist ecological self," which is defined by a symbiotic relationship with the natural world. This redefined identity necessitates "restoring and valuing human relationships with the Other of wilderness," which Gaard believes is crucial for developing and sustaining an ecofeminist perspective. She concludes with a call to action for ecofeminists to engage in "the redefinition, preservation, and expansion of wilderness," underscoring the inherent worth of nature beyond its utilitarian value (5).

An example of this value is in the character of Lace, who is deeply attached to the land and feels a sense of belonging and identity with it. She sees the beauty and worth of the mountains, the streams, the trees, and the animals, even when they are not profitable or convenient for humans. She also recognizes the harm that the mining companies are doing to the environment and the community, and she tries to resist and protest against them, ". Stay in their way—that's the only language they can hear. We are from here, it says. This is our place, it says. Listen here, it says. We exist" (267). Another example is in the character of Bant who also has a keen awareness of the ecological Self, which is Naess' concept of expanding one's sense of self to include other beings and the whole of nature. She feels a bond with the land as she says, "Monster shovel clawed the dirt and you felt it in your arm, your leg, your belly, and how lucky Grandma died, I thought" (141).

These are just two examples of how Pancake's novel expresses intrinsic value. There are many more instances where the characters show their respect and appreciation for nature, their empathy and compassion for other beings, and their desire to protect and

preserve life on Earth. Pancake's novel is a powerful and poignant portrayal of how humans can relate to nature more harmoniously and ethically. Nevertheless, the dominant culture and knowledge often overlook or reject the power, variety, and value of women and nature. They usually see women and nature as inactive, uniform, and useful. They often use women and nature as things to consume, exploit, or control; rather than as beings to respect, care, or cooperate with. They often enforce male, colonial, capitalist, human, or technological values on women and nature; rather than acknowledge their values. This view harms both women and nature. It causes the suffering of women through gender, race, class, sexuality, age, ability, or other forms of discrimination or violence. It also causes damage to nature through air, water, or soil contamination; forest destruction; resource overuse; species loss; global temperature change; or other forms of destruction.

4.3. Conflict with Technology

Technology is one of the main topics in ecofeminist criticism, as it is seen as a weapon of domination, abuse, and violence that affects human-nature relations in harmful ways. However, technology can also be a source of strength, opposition, and creativity for ecofeminist movements. One of the main ecofeminist criticisms of technology is that it is based on instrumental logic that views nature as a resource to be controlled, changed, and used for human purposes. This logic is also applied to women, who are seen as things to be used, controlled, and dominated by men. Technology, in this view, is not neutral or value-free, but rather reflects and supports the interests and values of those who make and control it. Gaard has discussed the relationship between technology and ecofeminism, particularly critiquing the patriarchal and capitalist perspectives that view nature as a resource to be exploited. In "Ecofeminism Revisited: Rejecting Essentialism and Re-Placing Species in a Material Feminist Environmentalism," she revisits ecofeminism, rejecting essentialism and advocating for a material feminist environmentalism that recognizes the interconnectedness of various forms of oppression, including sexism, racism, classism, colonialism, speciesism, and environmental degradation. Gaard emphasizes the importance of recuperating ecofeminist insights to provide a foundation for current theories and activities. Her perspective is that technology, influenced by these oppressive systems, often leads to environmental harm and disregards the intrinsic value of nature.

Mellor in her article "Feminism and Environmental Ethics: A Materialist Perspective" observes the ecofeminist conflict of the capitalist patriarchy with wilderness

as “the dilemma of human embodiment exists as a fundamental feature of the human condition but it becomes most destructive in the divided societies of capitalist patriarchy where domination and transcendence of the natural world is central” (111). In *The Death of Nature*, Carolyn Merchant mentions that patriarchy, which is the basic contention of the exploitation of the planet, has paved the way to all destructive attitudes in the form of advancement in science and technology, capitalism, market economy, production to consumption, and so on; “technology innovation, the spread of the capitalist market, the scientific revolution, and changing attitudes towards nature and the earth” (43). Some transcendentalists, such as Henry David Thoreau, were critical of technology and its effects on society and the environment. Thoreau famously lived in a cabin in the woods for two years, where he practiced a simple and self-reliant lifestyle. He wrote in his book *Walden*: “Our inventions are wont to be pretty toys, which distract our attention from serious things. They are but improved means to an unimproved end” (44).

Vandana Shiva also argues that technology is not a neutral or value-free tool, but rather a tool of domination that shapes human-nature relations in harmful ways. As she claims, “Technology is not a neutral tool which can be used for good or evil. It is a product of a particular culture which has a particular world view” (60). She criticizes the instrumental rationality that views nature as a resource to be manipulated, transformed, and consumed for human ends, and that also applies to women, who are seen as objects to be used, controlled, and dominated by men. She also challenges the dualism between culture and nature, where culture is associated with reason, progress, and civilization, while nature is associated with emotion, stagnation, and barbarism. She claims that this dualism devalues both women and nature, as they are seen as inferior to men and culture. She asserts, “Development has meant the ecological and cultural rupture of bonds with nature, and within society, it has meant the transformation of organic communities into groups of uprooted and alienated individuals searching for abstract identities” (99).

In Pancake's novel, the relationship between nature and technology is a prominent theme. The narrative explores the complex interplay between these two forces and how technology shapes and impacts the natural world. Throughout the novel, Pancake presents the destructive consequences of industrialization and the exploitation of natural resources, particularly through the lens of mountaintop removal mining. As Vandana Shiva observes, “Peasants and farmers are thus robbed of their means of livelihood by the new technology which becomes an instrument of poverty and underdevelopment” (29). This destructive practice not only alters the physical landscape but also disrupts the delicate ecological balance, leading to environmental degradation and the loss of

biodiversity. The portrayal of nature serves as a stark contrast to the invasive presence of technology and highlights the devastating effects it can have on the natural world.

In Pancake's novel, one of the sons named Corey who is a young boy has a close relationship with machines and is fond of collecting equipment that has been washed away by the flood. In one of Corey's chapters, he "[has] already thought through the best plan" (274) to ride a four-wheeler but has to be careful not to attract too much attention from the neighbors or the authorities. Corey shows awareness of the machines' functions although he is just a child. In fact, it is the same four-wheeler with which he has an accident at the end of the story that leads to his unfortunate death.

In her book, *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*, Karen Warren addresses the topic of technology and how it relates to ecofeminism. She suggests alternative ways of using technology that enhance the well-being of animals and their habitats. Lace, too, would "tell people the truth" (257) and inform other inhabitants of the village of the dangers of the wrong way of mining coal, "I just believe they can do it a better way, a way that would actually give us more jobs and not ruin everything we have" (257). Added to that, women and children are (after nature) also victims of synthetic chemicals, pesticides, and insecticides, since the poison will be passed from mother to offspring. In *Strange as this Weather Has Been*, this aspect of the equal harm done to nature and women is exhibited as follows:

His face snapped up towards the window in surprise, and he did, the fish sliding out of his hands. Then I was rushing out, I was jerking him up over the bank to the outside spigot, and then I was scrubbing his hands, "Bant!" I heard me hollering. "Get me some soap!" Then Bant was there, handing me the dishwashing stuff off the sink and saying, "What's wrong, Mom? They're just dead fish." (227)

In the excerpt, Lace reacts to the sight of dead fish in the creek near her home. The dead fish are a result of the mountaintop removal mining that has polluted the water and destroyed the ecosystem. Lace is horrified by the damage done to nature and tries to wash away the contamination from her son's hands.

5. Conclusion

This research has explored the ecofeminist themes in Ann Pancake's *Strange as this Weather Has Been*. It has aimed to examine how the notions related to ecofeminist criticism are manifested in the novel and how the female characters subvert the patriarchal systems that seek to devalue both women and nature. It discusses how the

female characters challenge patriarchal oppression and actively participate in the ecofeminist movement. The article provides the ecofeminist perspectives of Gaard and other prominent ecofeminist scholars.

In the analytical arguments of the article, key notions such as inherent affinity and dualism, agency and intrinsic values, and conflict with technology have been explored and contextualized in the novel. The article reveals that Ann Pancake has employed an ecofeminist approach to address the environmental and social setbacks faced by Appalachia and its inhabitants. The primary female characters, Lace and Bant, show their affinity with nature and their agency as guardians of the Earth. In addition, the article highlights that the author challenges the dualistic and hierarchical logic of Western culture that separates and suppresses women and nature. It also indicates that technology, as a product of a patriarchal and capitalist culture, perceives nature as a resource to be exploited and dominated. The novel laments the environmental and social impacts of mountaintop removal mining, which is a destructive form of technology that alters the landscape, disrupts the ecological balance and leaves permanent scars on the face of the earth.

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