

A Narratological-Ecofeminist Reading of Bijan Najdi's "Roos-e Asbrizi"

Abolfazl Horri¹

Abstract

This article investigates Bijan Najdi's story, "The Day of Horse-Falling," in light of ecofeminist criticism and narratology. It explores how Najdi's narrative portrays the oppression of women and nature within a patriarchal framework. The key questions addressed in this study are as follows: How does Najdi employ narratological techniques to link women and nature? And how do these methods relate to the power structures within feudal and tribal societies? This study aims to analyse Najdi's narrative techniques in highlighting the double oppression of women and nature, and to present a comprehensive analysis of the patriarchal power relations in a traditional society. This study underscores the significance of Najdi's story as an example of Iranian ecofeminist literature, which contributes to the awareness of women's and environmental issues in Iran's cultural context. Informed by ecofeminist and narratological approaches, the research presents a qualitative analysis of the story. It demonstrates how the solidarity between women and nature is portrayed through the perspectives of the horse and Asieh. Additionally, it examines Najdi's poeticity and symbolic imagery in depicting identities and emotional connections. The findings reveal that by telling the narrative from the horse's first-person point of view, Najdi challenges the patriarchal structure of the village. The disappearance of the horse and Asieh, followed by the horse's capture as well as by identity distortion, symbolises the persistent oppression of women in a patriarchal society. The study shows that power relations in such contexts are deeply entrenched, and attempts to evade them are often futile.

Keywords: Eco-feminism, Narratology, Nature, Femininity, Identity distortion

Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

Bijan Najdi (1941-1995) is among the Iranian writers who pay special attention to women and especially their connection with both outer and inner natures. In his

1. Associate Professor in English Language and Literature, Arak University, Arak, Iran.
(horri2004tr@gmail.com)

collection of short stories, *The Leopards Who Have Run with Me* (2009), the traces of these themes can be easily identified, particularly through Najdi's poetic language. The story "Roos-e Asbrizi" ("The Day of Horse-Falling") is one of these stories, in which Najdi portrays the subjugation of women within the power structure arising from patriarchy in a feudal society governed by tribal relations. He narrates the story through the perspective of the Khan's cherished horse in the village. By creating empathy between the horse and Asieh, he tries to show the unshakeable nature of power relations in such societies and the subjugation of individuals, especially women, in these relations; neither nature, represented by the horse, nor humans, represented by Asieh, can avoid this patriarchal structure. The horse is harnessed to a cart, and Asieh is condemned to accept a predetermined fate in which she has no role. Najdi's poeticity, which also carries an ironic and satirical tone, is what gives this unshakeable nature of power relations an aesthetic dimension. At the same time, for Najdi, women and nature provide a context where, beyond gender discussions, both can be endowed with a humanistic dimension.

2. Methodology

Informed by a qualitative method and accessible library resources related to ecofeminism and Bijan Najdi, this article demonstrates how women and nature are represented in the short story "Roos-e Asbrizi" and how Asieh and the horse, through their empathy, reveal the status of women and nature in the patriarchal society, where the story takes place. The focus on the interconnection between women and nature in light of ecofeminist criticism has several significant points and functions:

1. Understanding how Bijan Najdi uses narrative techniques to represent the connection between women and nature might help to enhance narratological studies and provide new models for analyzing literary texts.
2. Analysing the fundamental patriarchal power relations in a feudal and tribal society is significant because it may lead to a better understanding of social structures and oppressive powers, paving the way for social and cultural changes in all societies, particularly feudal ones.

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundations of this article are informed by a combination of cultural, mythological, and sociological approaches commonly used in ecofeminist criticism, with an overt emphasis on analysing the narrative elements of the story. The concept of ecofeminism emerged from the amalgamation of the fields of ecology and feminism and quickly found its way into the realm of literary criticism under the concept of ecocriticism, forming its own intellectual and philosophical framework (Glotfelty, 1996). In the tradition

of literary criticism and theory in the West, this concept has primarily been intertwined with gender issues. Feminist critics have directed the course of ecocritical studies towards gender studies, believing that just as industry has dominated and subdued nature (natural domination), men have also subjugated women (gender domination). They argue that just as nature needs to be liberated from the grips of industry (natural liberation), women also need to be freed from male dominance (gender liberation). Therefore, ecofeminism not only strives to liberate nature and women from the subjugation of industry and men, but it also fights for the equal social and cultural status of nature and women (Gaard, 2017). At the same time, ecofeminism holds that part of these issues and problems related to nature and women are connected to patriarchal power relations, which have economic causes and are specific to societies with a patriarchal power hierarchy.

4. Discussion and Analysis

From the ecofeminist perspective, what needs to be toned down or completely eradicated is the hierarchical binary opposition of dominant/subordinate, which in this story is manifested through the relations between Qalan-Khan/horse or Asieh. In this respect, the fundamental problem in these societies, which have a feudal and lord-peasant system, is the binary opposition of dominant/subordinate. Ecofeminism strives to refute this binary opposition, which is the root of inequality and discrimination. Najdi coins "Rooz-e Asbrizi" for the title of his story. In this story, Qalan-Khan wins the race on the day of "Asbrizi." However, if we suppose that the horse and Asieh are identical (empathically and emotionally), the threat posed by Qalan-Khan is not actually directed toward the horse, but fundamentally toward Asieh: If Asieh, like the horse, tries to rebel and escape, she will meet the same fate as the horse. The essence of the discussion is that ecofeminism aims to create opportunities for more active participation of women in the society by emphasizing the connection between women and nature.

5. Conclusion

Overall, ecofeminism focuses on the common issues faced by women and the environment, demonstrating that women consider these issues as serious challenges and strive to resolve them. The results of this analysis align with many findings derived from the approaches introduced in the theoretical resources related to ecofeminist criticism. Specifically, it explores how men, industry, and society have subjugated nature in the same way they have oppressed women and seeks the liberation of both women and nature from this oppression. The key findings include:

1. Some principles of ecofeminism, particularly the romantic relationship between the horse/nature and Asieh/womanhood, are effectively depicted in the story "Rooz-e Asbrizi."
2. From a narratological perspective, the horse, as the first-person narrator, expresses its own voice and invites the reader to view the events from its own perspective.
3. The horse and Asieh disrupt the patriarchal structure of the village and attempt to escape, but ultimately, the horse is captured and loses its significance and emotional connection with Asieh.
4. Ecofeminist criticism seeks to expose the mechanisms of domination over women within the power structures arising from patriarchy in a feudal society, showing that the subjugation of women is entrenched in tribal and family relations.
5. By narrating the story from the horse's viewpoint, ecofeminist criticism illustrates that power relations in such contexts are immutable and there is no easy way to escape these power structures. Thus, this type of criticism reveals the fragility of power relations structures.

In summary, an ecofeminist reading of "Rooz-e Asbrizi," as a story narrated by a horse, reveals the connection between nature and womanhood, highlighting the resilience of women and nature in patriarchal power structures in a feudal society.

Bibliography

- Bagheri, N. 2016. "Eco-Feminism in Contemporary Female Iranian Poetry." *Journal of Environmental Literature*, 5(2), 112-125.
- Garrard, G. 2012. *Ecocriticism*. Routledge.
- Garrard, G. 2014. *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Genette, G. 1980. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University.
- Glotfelty, C. and Harold F. (Eds.). 1996. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Athens and London: University of Georgia Press.
- Griffin, S. 2000. *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*. New York: Harper.
- Karren J. W. 2014. *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*. Rawat Publication.
- Merchant, C. 1990. *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*. Harper One.
- Mies, M. and Shiva, V. 1993. *Ecofeminism*. London: Zed Books.
- Naess, A. 1989. *Shallow and Deep Ecology*. Cambridge University Press.
- Najdi, B. 2010. *Youz-palang-an-I ke ba Man Davideh-and*. Tehran: Nashr-e Markaz. (*The Leopards Who Have Run With Me*) [In Persian].

- Parsapur, Z. 2013. *Naqd-e Boom-gara (Adabiyat va Tabiyat)*. Tehran: Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies. (*Eco-criticism (Literature and Nature)*) [In Persian].
- Ruether, R. 1978. *New Woman New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Humam Liberation*. Seabury Press.
- Vakoch, D. A. 2023. *The Routledge Handbook of Ecofeminism and Literature*. Routledge.

How to cite:

Horri, A. 2024. "A Narratological-Ecofeminist Reading of Bijan Najdi's "Roos-e Asbrizi"", *Naqd va Nazaryeh Adabi*, 18(1): 225-247. DOI:10.22124/naqd.2024.26260.2538

Copyright:

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to *Naqd va Nazaryeh Adabi (Literary Theory and Criticism)*.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided that the original work is properly cited.

