

# Analysis of Runaway and The Scarlet Letter from the Perspective of Ecofeminism

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## Abstract

The basic idea of ecofeminism is that both women and nature are oppressed by the patriarchal society, so women should rise up to change the unreasonable situation, to promote the harmonious coexistence between human and nature, men and women. Runaway is a masterpiece of Alice Munro published in 2004 in Canada. The Scarlet Letter is a representative work of Nathaniel Hawthorne, an American writer. The two works were published more than a century apart with different social backgrounds, however, they both embody the eco-feminist consciousness. In recent years, some scholars have begun to pay attention to the eco-feminist consciousness in this two works. But so far, nearly no article directly compare these two works from the perspective of ecofeminism. This article attempts to reveal the ecological feminist idea in these two works through analyzing two kinds of relationship that are stressed by ecofeminism-the relationships between woman and nature, men and women. To explore this, we need pay attention to the relationships between heroines, heroines and heroes. By analysis the ecological feminist idea in these two works, we can draw a conclusion that women should be bravely against the oppression of the patriarchal society, gain independence in mind and economy, and promote the building of a society where mankind and nature, men and women coexist in harmony.

## Keywords

Runaway; The Scarlet Letter; Ecofeminism; Nature.

## 1. Introduction

Ecofeminism advocates people to abandon the wrong anthropocentrism and male-centrism concepts, and construct a society of gender equality and harmonious coexistence between human and nature. Ecofeminism in literary works can be discussed from the following two perspectives: one is to explore the relationship between women and nature; the other is to think about the relationship between women and men.

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## 2. A Brief Introduction of Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism advocates abandoning the wrong anthropocentrism and male-centrism concepts, and advocates the construction of a society of gender equality and harmonious coexistence between human and nature. In 1974, the concept of "ecofeminism" first appeared in France. The basic idea of ecofeminism is that both women and nature are oppressed by the patriarchal society, so women should rise up to change the unreasonable situation to promote gender equality and harmonious coexistence of human and nature. Ecofeminism in literary works can be discussed from the following two perspectives: one is to explore the relationship between women and nature; the other is to think about the relationship between women and men.

## 3. The Close Link between Women and Nature

### 3.1. The Close Link between Carla and Flora

In *Runaway*, Munro mainly reflects the close connection between women and nature by showing the female character Carla and the animal character in nature, the little goat Flora, and their relationship. Carla lives with Clark, who is bad-tempered and often loses his temper with Carla. Carla often feels depressed when she lives with Clark. When she feels depressed, Flora, the little goat, can relieve her sadness and provide her with psychological comfort. It can be said that Flora is one of Carla's important spiritual sustenance. And Flora is attached to Carla, too. When Flora went missing, Carla was so worried that she posted notices on the Internet to try to find it, asked the horses if they had heard from Flora, and even dreamed about it. This all reflects the close connection between Carla and Flora.

At the same time, this connection is established in the male-centered social background. Compared to men, Carla and Flora are both vulnerable groups. When Flora returned one night, Clark refused to let it meet Carla. Carla guesses that Flora was killed or driven away by Clark. Regardless of the truth, Clark cruelly decided the fate of Flora in order to destroy Carla's spiritual sustenance and completely suppress Carla's desire to rebel and escape. This reflects that in the patriarchal society, women and nature are oppressed by men.

### 3.2. The Close Link between Hester and Nature

In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne mainly reflects the connection between women and nature by showing the close relationship between the female character Hester and the natural environment. Hester was punished by the authorities for her pursuit of love. She was punished to wear the symbol of shame "scarlet letter A", and she was criticized, despised and alienated by the whole society at that time. The patriarchal society in which she lived was a bitter abyss. She was homeless in a patriarchal society, and only nature could take her in. She chose to live on the edge of the peninsula, away from residential areas. It was here that she got rid of the disdainful eyes and gained her dignity.

In addition, nature gave Hester new strength. Forest is a part of nature and one of the important natural environments in the novel. In the forest, Hester is not restrained by the patriarchal society, she can live with dignity and freedom. Here, without strict dogma and the disdain of others, she could cast off her bondage and be born anew.

## 4. The Relationship between Women and Men

### 4.1. Carla is Economically and Ideologically Dependent on Men and Fails to Escape from the Repressive State of the Patriarchal Society

In the patriarchal society, the male image is positive and strong, while the female image is passive and weak. Women often do not have stable economic income, and because women have

been in a male-dominated society for a long time, they often lose the sense of equality between men and women. Therefore, many women depend on men economically and ideologically. In the novel *Runaway*, Carla gives up going to college and lives with Clark without independent and self-sufficient income. As Clark has been almost taken up the whole of Carla's life for a long time, Carla develops a great emotional attachment to Clark, so much that she is afraid of a life without Clark. Therefore, Carla is financially and emotionally attached to Clark. As a result, most of the time, she had to endure Clark's disrespect, anger and oppression in silence. Her greatest resistance was to escape with Sylvia's help. However, when she was on the bus, she wanted to tell Clark what she thought on the road, and she was scared and trembling, feeling that she can't live alone without Clark. Eventually, she gave up and returned to her original suppressed state. This tragic outcome is largely due to Carla's lack of financial and ideological independence. It can be seen that women should be independent ideologically and economically if they want to gain equal status with men.

#### **4.2. Hester Changes from Initial Submission to Male to All-out Resistance and Finally Gains a New Life**

In the novel *The Scarlet Letter*, Hester's marriage partner Chillingworth was not chosen by Hester herself, but by her father. Hester blindly followed her father's opinion and entrusted her happiness to an unknown person, which was one of the important reasons for her unhappy marriage. Chillingworth selfishly treated Hester as an object in their marriage, failing to give her due respect and love. Hester's marriage was very unhappy, and after Chillingworth left her and lost any news, she felt lonely and miserable.

Under the double pressure of loneliness and hardship, Hester began to rebel. She made three main rebellions. Firstly, she bravely pursued a new love, fell in love with a clergyman, Dimmesdale and gave birth to a daughter, Pearl. Secondly, on the scaffold, she refused to tell the identity of Pearl's father in order to protect her beloved. Later, he became financially self-sufficient through needlework. Thirdly, she bravely told Dimmesdale Chillingworth's true identity, and encouraged him to leave with her and pursue love. Through repeated resistance, she defended love and protected the people who were important to her. Finally, she gained a new life. From her experience, we know that in order to be free and equal to men, women should resist and become economically self-sufficient.

### **5. Conclusion**

Ecofeminism advocates abandoning the wrong anthropocentrism and male-centrism concepts, and advocates the construction of a beautiful society of gender equality and harmonious coexistence between man and nature. Both *Runaway* and *The Scarlet Letter* contain the author's ecofeminism thought, but there are some differences in the way of expression. Both *Runaway* and *The Scarlet Letter* show the close connection between women and nature and women's attempts to resist the oppression of the patriarchal society. However, Carla in *Runaway* failed to achieve ideological and economic independence. Although she tried to rebel by fleeing, she failed and eventually returned to the suppressed state. In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hester has mature independent thought and economic independence, so she finally succeeds in gaining a new life. Through the analysis of these two works, people can get the enlightenment that women should bravely resist the unreasonable situation in man-dominant society and obtain ideological and economic independence to build a society where human and nature, men and women coexist harmoniously.

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