

Dark Ecology

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Abstract: *Ecology is the study of the relationships between living organisms and their environment, emphasizing the balance and interdependence that sustain life on Earth. Today, the world faces an ecological crisis caused by deforestation, climate change, pollution, and the loss of biodiversity, threatening both nature and humanity's survival. This paper explores the concept of Dark Ecology in Charlotte McConaghy's novel Once There Were Wolves, examining the complex and unsettling relationship between humans and the natural world. Based on Timothy Morton's concept, Dark Ecology rejects the romantic idea of nature as pure and separate from humanity, instead showing that all life forms, including humans, are deeply interconnected through both beauty and decay. McConaghy sets her narrative in the Scottish Highlands, where the protagonist Inti Flynn leads a rewilding project to reintroduce wolves into a damaged ecosystem. The novel uses the wolves as symbols of both fear and renewal, revealing how ecological restoration is filled with moral ambiguity and emotional tension. Inti's strong empathetic connection with the wolves blurs the boundaries between human and animal, reflecting Morton's belief that true ecological understanding requires confronting darkness, violence, and discomfort rather than seeking peace or separation. The hostility of the local community toward the wolves mirrors humanity's broader denial of its interdependence with the natural world and fear of facing its destructive tendencies. McConaghy also connects environmental degradation with gender-based violence and emotional trauma, showing how the exploitation of nature parallels the oppression of women. Through this intertwining of ecological and personal suffering, the novel argues that healing can only occur by accepting darkness as part of life and by embracing the cycles of death, pain, and renewal that sustain the planet. In this sense, Once There Were Wolves redefines ecological ethics through empathy, compassion, and acknowledgment of complexity. The novel ultimately embodies the principles of Dark Ecology by challenging readers to see nature not as a source of purity or redemption, but as a mirror reflecting humanity's own contradictions. It invites a deeper awareness of coexistence—one that recognizes the moral and emotional truths hidden within the tangled beauty and brutality of the natural world*

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