

Posthumanism and Speciesism: A Critical Study in T.C. Boyle's *When the Killing's Done*

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Abstract

Posthumanism is a philosophical and cultural movement that explores ideas which often intersect with animal ethics, environmental ethics, and bioethics. It encourages a more interconnected understanding of life, challenging traditional boundaries that separate humans from the rest of the natural world. In the context of Speciesism, posthumanism challenges the hierarchical view that places humans at the top of the moral and intellectual hierarchy. Speciesism involves discrimination or bias in favour of one species and results in the exploitation of other species. T.C. Boyle's *When the Killing's Done* explore the controversial and ethical aspects of using lethal methods to eradicate invasive species. The novel depicts the real-life conservation efforts on the Channel Islands, where the National Park Service initiates programs to eliminate non-native species threatening the native ecosystems. This paper examines the posthumanistic view on anthropocentrism and ideologies of Speciesism through the characters Alma Boyd Takesue, Dave LaJoy, and Anise Reed.

Keywords: Anthropocentrism; Environmental Ethics; Morality; Posthumanism; Speciesism.

Introduction

Posthumanism is a philosophical movement that emerged in the 20th century, as a response to the technological advancements and societal changes of the time and gained momentum during the 1960s and 1970s. There are noteworthy thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Donna Haraway, and Marshall McLuhan who advocated on inclusive and interconnected understanding of humanity. Posthumanism challenges dualistic thinking that separates humans from animals and nature. This critique is central to animal studies within a posthumanistic framework, aiming to break

down artificial boundaries that perpetuate speciesism. It encourages holistic and interconnected understanding of the relationships between humans and other species.

The English philosopher Richard Ryder coined the term 'Speciesism' in the 1970s, and Australian philosopher, Peter Singer later popularized it. Brian Duignan in the article "Speciesism" states, "Ryder, Singer, and other opponents of speciesism have claimed that it is exactly analogous to racism, sexism, and other forms of irrational discrimination and prejudice". (Encyclopaedia Britannica). It involves treating certain species as inherently superior or more valuable than others, often leading to the exploitation or mistreatment of those considered inferior. This concept is particularly applied to humans showing prejudice towards non-human animals based solely on their species membership. Speciesism challenges the idea that all living beings deserve moral consideration, argues for a more inclusive, ethical approach to the treatment of animals, and the recognition of their inherent value. It remains relevant in various domains, prompting ethical reflection and encouraging actions and policies that foster a more equitable and compassionate treatment of all living beings, regardless of their species.

Speciesism reflects on ethical and moral considerations related to the treatment of different species as in George Orwell's *Animal Farm* which touches on speciesism, where the pigs that exploit other animals on the farm represent humans. H.G. Wells' *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, a classic science fiction that explores themes of vivisection, the ethical treatment of animals, and questioning the boundaries between humans and other species is evident. Likewise, Laline Paull's *The Bees* is set in a dystopian society, where bees have human-like qualities, and explores the hierarchy, and exploitation based on social structures and speciesism.

In concurrence to these novels, T.C. Boyle's *When the Killing's Done* is one such novel that revolves around environmental conservation efforts in the Channel Islands off the coast of Southern California, USA. Based on the real life Anacapa project and people, the characters tackle with the ethics of eradicating invasive species to restore the balance of the ecosystem. This theme intersects with posthumanism as it challenges the conventional human-centric view of nature. The novel prompts and questions the traditional hierarchy that places humans above other species, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all living beings. T.C. Boyle's *When the Killing's Done* explores complex ethical, environmental issues, and aspects of speciesism.

The story revolves around the conflict between two characters, Alma Boyd Takesue, an impassioned wildlife biologist, and Dave LaJoy, an animal rights activist. The novel focuses on their opposing views on controlling invasive species in the Channel Islands. Through the lens of speciesism, *When the Killing's Done* delves into complex ethical questions that parallel with human behaviour in the real world. Susanne Leikam in the article "Environmental Imaginations of the California Channel Islands and Ecological Crisis in T.C. Boyle's *When the Killing's Done*" ". . . renders the supposedly rational treatment of ecosystems based on calculated historical baselines, species classification, and the predictability of human interventions not only an illusion but also as ethically dubious" (149).

Anthropocentrism and Conservation: Humans' Attitudes towards Animals

Posthumanism challenges the anthropocentric view that places humans at the centre of the moral and intellectual universe. The deconstruction of anthropocentrism is essential for recognizing the intelligence, emotional lives of non-human animals, and moving beyond speciesist hierarchies. The conflict in the novel highlights anthropocentric tendencies in conservation efforts. It questions whether certain species are deemed more valuable because of their perceived benefit to humans, potentially reinforcing speciesist perspectives. Alma Boyd Takesue, Dave LaJoy, and Anise Reed are three characters who comprehend the issues related to species conservation. Alma is a dedicated and well-educated biologist tasked with managing invasive species on the Channel Islands. Her commitment to preserving native ecosystems shapes much of the novel's narrative. Alma is driven by a scientific approach to conservation, emphasizing the protection of native species. Her unwavering dedication sometimes leads to moral conflicts with other characters and prompts to consider the consequences of such rigid environmental ethics.

The narrative occasionally shifts to laboratories and offices, where Alma and other officers work on conservation projects. These settings provide insight into the scientific and bureaucratic aspects of conservation efforts and showcase the challenges faced by those attempting to restore ecological balance. Alma asserts about the collapse of the ecosystem due to outnumbered invasive species such as rats and pigs from Anacapa Island and Santa Cruz. She also opines that biologists have done research on this area and that they cannot heed to the words of environmental activists who proudly say, "We're scientists. We do the studies. . . people don't want facts, they don't want to know about island biogeography or the impact

of invasive species or ecosystem collapse or anything else" (50). There is a complex relationship between the scientists group represented by Alma, and the environmental activists group represented by Dave in order to protect the biodiversity of the Channel Islands. The challenge of eliminating invasive species is examined, using insights gained from other nations facing similar problems. In New Zealand, for example, Frazier, the creator of Island Healers, has successfully managed to eradicate exotic species that outnumber local species.

In contrast, Dave LaJoy represents the animal rights (For the Protection of Animals, FPA) from the perspective of an activist who opposes Alma's approach to invasive species management. He disagrees with the gruesome methods formulated by the scientists for the massive killing of three thousand rats and he reiterates the fact that the rats are there in these islands for hundred years than of the humans living here. He criticises the authorities on mass killing of animals by saying, "You're [scientists] no better than executioners" . . . Kill everything, that's your solution. Kill, kill, kill" (62). His views contradict with that of Alma's. Dave states the reasons for not killing the species that they are harmless and are required for the health and welfare of the island's ground-nesting birds depend on these species. He treats all the animals equally whether it is a bird or a rat.

Similarly, Anise Reed also supports Dave. She is a park service PR agent and is in love with Dave. She is caught between the conflicting viewpoints of Alma and LaJoy. Her character introduces an element of ethical ambiguity, as she grapples with the public relations aspect of conservation efforts. Anise reflects the challenges of communicating complex environmental issues to the public. Her character highlights the role of public perception in shaping environmental policies and the difficulties in balancing scientific expertise with public opinion.

This perspective enables a nuanced exploration of each character's internal conflicts and moral dilemmas. The characters undergo significant development as the narrative unfolds, revealing layers of complexity and challenging readers to re-evaluate their own perspectives on conservation and species management. T.C. Boyle skillfully uses the interplay of characters to explore the intricate ethical landscape of environmental decision-making. These characters contribute to the novel's critical analysis of speciesism, conservation, and the moral responsibilities inherent in managing ecosystems. The characters' attitudes towards animals reflect varying degrees of speciesism. Alma, as a biologist, sees the need to protect native species and ecosystems, potentially justifying the killing

of invasive species. Dave, on the other hand, advocates for animal rights, challenging the human-centric view that justifies the killing of one species for the benefit of another.

T.C. Boyle creates a multifaceted story that explores the complexities of environmental ethics, the consequences of human actions on ecosystems, and the intricate relationships between people and nature. The novel reflects on the delicate balance between conservation, preservation, and the ethical dilemma surrounding environmental decision-making. T.C. Boyle examines the historical and contemporary impact of human activities on the natural world. The narrative highlights how human interventions, such as introducing or eradicating species, captive breeding method can have far-reaching and sometimes unintended consequences on ecosystems. The scientists plan to reintroduce the native species after killing the invasive species and Alma explains about the plan by saying “. . . we’ve [biologists] trapped a representative population for captive breeding and release after the rats have been extirpated—and we expect them to repopulate very quickly in the absence of competition from the rats” (61). Through the characters’ relationships with the natural world, the novel explores the emotional and psychological connections individuals have with nature. It delves into how personal beliefs and experiences shape one’s approach to environmental issues.

Environmental Ethics: Invasive species Versus Native species

Beyond individual animals, speciesism is relevant to broader environmental ethics. It encourages consideration of the intrinsic value of entire ecosystems and the interconnectedness of all species within them. Speciesism is to be taken to consideration with regard to the use of animals in scientific experiments and medical research. It prompts ethical scrutiny of practices that cause harm to animals for human benefit. The novel addresses the ethical dilemma of controlling invasive species which involves selectively killing certain animals to protect native species. This decision raises questions about the value placed on different species and the consequences of human intervention in natural environments. It delves into the ethical considerations of conservation practices, raising questions about the consequences of human intervention in natural ecosystems. It explores the varying perspectives on what constitutes ethical behaviour in preserving or restoring environments. *When the Killing’s Done* explores several complex and interconnected themes of morality, killing one species for another, and captive breeding that reflect the ethical dilemmas surrounding conservation and human interaction with the environment.

Alma cares about the environment, and insisted on using silverware and plates at public gatherings rather than plastic, saying that “plastic is the devil’s polymer” (104). Despite her issues as a scientist, she still feels compassion for the natural world. Dave’s passion for animal rights and his extreme actions challenge the traditional conservational narrative. He questions the human-centric view that justifies the killing of certain species for the benefit of others to confront the ethics of intervention. Dave unveils it as, “if that action requires the extirpation of an invasive and pernicious species—killing, that is, the killing of innocent animals . . . health and welfare, the very existence of the island’s ground-nesting birds, will depend on it. . .” (42). He also expresses his agony on the after effects of using brodifacoum which will not only kill rats but also the infected carcass of rats can kill the brown tree snake through internal bleeding within three hours. Speciesism encourages individuals to reflect on their ethical stance regarding the treatment of animals. It encourages questioning practices that involve unnecessary harm or exploitation. John Simons in the book *Animal Rights and the Politics of Literary Representation* convey that “the position that one species has superiority to another, . . . speciesism on the simple basis . . . a duty to protect our own species and thus ensure its evolutionary survival . . . treating other species with less respect or regard than so be it” (16).

Anise is an emphatic person and the best character portrayed by T.C. Boyle, a vegan and one who represents animal rights. Perhaps the character most suited to convey the animal rights perspective in the eradication dispute though not so much because of her verbalizing, which is limited to brief denunciations against the killing of animals or the consumption of animal goods. Anise, who plays a supporting role in the story, represents the numerous historical alterations made to the island ecosystems and the previous human presence on the islands, which Dave frequently romanticizes and Alma scarcely acknowledges.

Moral Complexity and Consideration

Alma’s internal struggle between professional duty and personal values adds depth to her character. Her decisions reflect the tension between the practicalities of conservation and the emotional responses to the killing of animals. The novel gives moral consideration beyond human interests, challenging traditional speciesist viewpoints. It prompts reflection on the interconnectedness of ecosystems and the need for a more inclusive ethical framework in environmental decision-making. The novel serves as a thought-provoking exploration of speciesism within the context of inva-

sive species control. Alma knows that scientists commit mistake and they realise that they have introduced animals such as sheep, cattle and pigs on Santa Cruz and Santa Rosa; and rats and cats on Anacapa and Santa Barbara. They feel that it is their duty and obligation to take steps to eradicate it. Daniel Simberoff in his review article titled, "T.C. Boyle: When the Killing's Done" corroborates about Alma as, "She is complicated: a vegetarian who is revulsed at the sight of dying and dead mammals, she nevertheless is wholly devoted to eradicating both rats and pigs. . . ." (2165).

Dave is an unreliable character with a mysterious commitment to animal rights. He also voices out the struggles of animals because of poisoning and he points out that, "The fact is that this poison—call it by what it is, why don't you?— this poison causes slow death from internal bleeding over anywhere from three to ten days. Ten days! You call that humane?" (62). This calls into doubt the moral worth of people. He also points out that there is secondary poisoning that would take place due to scavenge of the dying animals. His activism adds a layer of moral complexity to the novel. LaJoy serves as a symbolic figure representing the broader ethical debate surrounding speciesism. His actions and ideology force to question the beliefs about the value of different species. He seeks medical attention due to his very violent temper, and he is prescribed Xanax by Dr. Rieser which he refuses to take. In many of his daily dealings with people, waitresses, salespeople and he becomes easily and irrationally irritated, and it seems that his money has bred a sense of self-importance and irritation with everyone around him. Dave makes enough money and he runs a chain of upscale home entertainment centres and has time to battle the eradication of animals in court as well as uses sabotage methods like damaging her car and protesting in front of her office to show his dislike towards Alma.

Boyle credits a single moment 20 years ago, when one of the salesgirls gave him a PETA booklet, for changing LaJoy's perspective on animals. He read it twice that evening and was instantaneously converted to voice out for animal rights and becomes an aspiring vegetarian, though he has since reverted to eating eggs and fish, much to Anise's dismay. Anise, a clever lady, does not appear unduly smitten with wealth, nevertheless attached to Dave, uncontrollably furious and prone to frightening outbursts on occasion. She denounces the killing of animals and using animal products. The novel engages in contemplating the ethical complexities surrounding the treatment of different species and the impact of human actions on the natural world and the environmental dilemmas faced by these characters. Boyle introduces moral complexity by portraying the

consequences of both action and inaction. Posthumanistic thought emphasizes the agency of non-human entities.

Animal studies also acknowledge that animals are more than passive subjects of human observation and exploitation. The killings refer to the intentional extermination of invasive species to restore the natural balance. Boyle examines the morality of people murdering animals through the figure of Dave as, "being civil when innocent animals are being tortured to death? Civil? I'll be civil when the killing's done and not a minute before. Those rats –" (63). The novel presents the ethical dilemmas that surround the actions and characters and debate over preserving native biodiversity and justify the killing of invasive species by lethal control measures. This theme raises questions about the morality of human intervention in ecosystems and the potential harm caused to individual animals.

Animal Value and Challenges

Speciesism is pertinent to discussions about conservation efforts and biodiversity. It raises questions about how interventions should be conducted to protect endangered species without causing harm to other species. Boyle advocates it as, " – that these islands, our islands, are equally unique. And equally worthy of preservation. And not simply preservation, but restoration" (57). The relevance of speciesism extends to legal and policy realms. Advocates may seek changes in laws to protect animals better and challenge practices that are deemed discriminatory or harmful based on species. This novel delves into environmental ethics and the human impact on ecosystems. It tackles issues of speciesism as characters engage in controversial practices to restore balance to the natural world. The narrative prompts reflection on the ethical considerations of human interventions in ecosystems and challenges traditional views of humanity's role in nature. The conflict between conservationists and animal rights activists is a central idea that has intrinsic value of animal in common. The novel presents the tension between those advocating for the preservation of endangered species and those opposing lethal methods of eradicating invasive species, emphasizing the ethical complexities involved. The Channel Islands serve as a symbolic battleground where differing ideologies clash. The struggle to control the islands and shape their ecosystems becomes a metaphor for the broader environmental conflicts occurring globally.

Many ethical discussions revolve around how humans treat and use other species. Advocates for animal rights argue against speciesism, emphasizing the moral importance of considering the well-being and rights of sen-

tient beings. However, opposing views often prioritize human interests over those of other animals, contributing to ongoing discussions about one's responsibilities towards other species in the modern world is to avoid speciesism. The novel touches on the bureaucratic challenges and political dimensions of conservation efforts. Boyle highlights the rights of the animals as, "It's a sad state of affairs when our own federal government considers feeding wildlife to be a crime, while at the same time raining down poison indiscriminately from the sky is okay – legitimate, I mean" (136).

Dave also reveals about the reality of the effects of brodifacoum and finds an antidote Vitamin K to save the animals. He also criticises about the awareness created for the general public through newspaper articles in the bottom line and slogan stating "save the animals" (75). In concurrence to it, Boyle also points out the harmful effects of chemicals the use of DDT and herbicide caused loss of habitat and reptile on Guam by Julie Savidge, who did the field work for Ph.D. He also cites that during World War II, Montrose Chemical dumped DDT in these islands affected the food chain and also hindered the formation of eggs of the native bald eagles. In the article "A Case for Animal Rights" Tom Regan identifies the species differences as, "...those animals that enough people care about (companion animals, whales, baby seals, the American bald eagle). . . though they lack rights themselves, will be protected because of the sentimental interests of people" (181-82). Boyle also portrays the plight and humiliation of the rats due to poisoning which results in bleeding out of their mouths, ears and anus. He also conflict the idea of chemical company lab that focuses and uses all the energy and talent to produce deadly poison brodifacoum and the scientists term it as 'rat candy' and 'rat cocaine' (87).

Dave depicts about the plight of the animals used for the experiments that the monkeys are tortured and mutilated. He reveals his agony as, "I'm not joking. I'm telling you: animals are conscious. They feel pain. They have the same right to life you have" (222). The rats are bred in uncountable numbers to suffer and die. Dave also asserts on the idea that people mocks and he expresses his agony as, "Rat lover. It's almost an oxymoron" (133). He also points out to save the lives of the innocent animals and need to safeguard the animals from the people who look for killing rather than preserving it. Dave fights for the animal rights and every time he fights for it, he is neglected in the court as the law works for the system, that is, National Park Service. Boyle also elaborates on the fact that humans should have 'the spirit of camaraderie' with nature.

Posthumanistic futures involve envisioning societies that are more inclusive of non-human entities. In the context of animal rights and welfare, speciesism is relevant to discussions about the fair and humane treatment of animals. It questions the moral justifications for using animals in various industries and supports the idea that animals have inherent value and rights. Mark Rowlands in the book *Animal Rights: Moral Theory and Practice* validates the inherent values of animals that “Regan argued that many sorts of non-human animals possess moral rights because they possess what he referred to as inherent value” (1). It raises questions about the effectiveness of policies and the compromises made in pursuit of environmental goals. The narrative emphasizes the unpredictable outcomes of human actions in nature. Despite well-intentioned efforts, interventions can lead to unforeseen and sometimes detrimental results, highlighting the complexities of ecological management. The themes of massive eradicating of invasive species, captive breeding of native species and reintroducing in the ecosystem collectively contribute to a thought-provoking exploration of the intricate relationships between humans and the environment, offering readers an opportunity to reflect on their own roles and responsibilities in the face of pressing environmental issues.

The relevance of speciesism lies in the ethical considerations surrounding the differential treatment of individuals based on their species. It is a concept that challenges the assumption that certain species have inherent superiority over others, often leading to discriminatory practices. Boyle’s storytelling prompts readers to reflect on their perceptions of humanity’s role in the natural order. By addressing themes of environmental ethics, interspecies communication, and the impact of human actions on ecosystems, Boyle contributes to the broader conversation about posthumanism and speciesism in contemporary literature.

Conclusion

Boyle deduces the fact of speciesism through the incidents presented in the novel, “the cascading effects of the artificial removal of one species to favor another” (306). Dave’s advocacy for individual rights and the intrinsic value of each species aligns with a more rights-oriented posthumanism that questions hierarchical distinctions between humans and other species. These character dynamics contribute to the novels’ exploration of posthumanism and speciesism. The conflicts and interactions serve as vehicles for readers to engage with ethical dilemmas, prompting reflection on the evolving relationships between humans and the natural world in the context of posthumanist thought.

The novel addresses the ethical dilemmas surrounding the preservation of endangered species, invasive species management, and the broader question of human responsibility for the environment. The vividly depicted settings contribute to the atmospheric and thought-provoking nature of the narrative. Through these characters, Boyle presents a nuanced exploration of posthumanist ideas. Alma's scientific pragmatism aligns with a utilitarian posthumanism that seeks to optimize the overall well-being of ecosystems. The debate within the novel reflects real-world discussions among conservationists, ethicists, and environmentalists about the most ethical and effective methods for managing invasive species while minimizing harm.

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