

## A Web of Life: An Ecocritical Study of Jane Smiley's *Moo*

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### Abstract

Pulitzer Prize winner Jane Smiley's *Moo* is a novel concerning some stories happening in a Midwestern agriculture university named Moo University. A variety of characters and threads of plots are involved in the novel. The arrangement of the characters and stories seem complex and mixed, and some parts of the stories are presented through the animal perspective. In order to figure out the reasons behind, the paper sorts out the characters and lines in the complicated structure, analyzes the interactions between animals and humans, and expounds on the interrelatedness in the web of life mainly from an angle of ecocriticism and ecofeminism. Through the ecocritical study of *Moo*, Jane Smiley's ecological ideologies are also revealed.

**Key words:** A Web of life; Ecological; Decentralization; Diversity; Interrelatedness; Ecocritical study

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### INTRODUCTION

Jane Smiley is an American novelist who won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1992 because of her fifth novel *A Thousand Acres* (1991). Since 1980 she has written 14 novels, 2 short story collections, 5 non-fiction books, and 5 young adult novels, among which *Moo* is

her sixth novel, published in 1995. The story is about the happenings on the campus of Moo University, a Midwestern university devoted to the art and science of agriculture. It's easy for some to regard *Moo* as a book about academia. However, according to Jane Smiley herself, it's far beyond that: "My overall subject is not academia. It's a larger point about technology and agriculture" (Nakadate, 2010, p.134). Like *A Thousand Acres*, *Moo* is also concerned with agriculture, but this time, a comic novel with some poignant revelations.

Since *Moo*'s publication, it has received diverse comments. One controversial point lies in its long list of characters, which is considered to be a hindrance to a round depiction of characters and a full development of plots in a few reviews, such as "Review of *Moo*" written by Emily Toth published in *Belles Lettres* 11.1 (Winter 1996), "Pork-Barrel Politics" by Laurie Taylor in *New Statesman and Society* 8.356 (June 9, 1995), "A Lively Satire of Derring-Do at Moo U" by Merle Rubin in *Christian Science Monitor* 87.89 (April 4, 1995), and "Very Flat, Iowa" by Michael Carlson in *Spectator* 274 (May 27, 1995). However, some other critiques highly appreciate the complex arrangement of the characters and plots in *Moo*. In his dissertation, Andrew calls it "Dickens-like penchant for interconnected characters" (Koch, 2008, p.49). Diane asserts:

Perhaps the reason Smiley is able to shine a light on so many areas of academic life is that *Moo* does not center on one character or main story so much as it gives a panoramic view of the operations, activities, and lives connected to this research university. (Nyhammer, 2007, p.194)

As a matter of fact, the novelist herself explains that

I thought its ecosystem-like structure would be not only obvious but appreciated. I thought the way in which the liberal characters used and transcended their self-centeredness to stop something they disapproved of would, could, should become a model for how well-meaning people can act together for a larger interest. (Nakadate, 2010, p.139)

On top of that, some critiques probe into the academics or professors in the fiction together with some other novelists' works, such as Catharine Stimpson's "Academics in Literature" in *Academe* (May/June, 2004), and a dissertation entitled "The Image of the Professor in American Academic Fiction 1980-1997" by Patricia Barber Verrone in Seton Hall University in 1999. There is also a comparative study of politics in the novel and another one from feminism standpoint—"The Problem of Politics in Feminist Literary Criticism: Contending Voices in Two Contemporary Novels" by Ryan Simmons published in *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* (Vol. 41, No. 4) in 2000. Furthermore, *Moo*'s influence spreads from literature field to economic one, resulting in an essay entitled "The University as a Social Economy: Jane Smiley's *Moo*" by Warren Samuels and Sylvia Samuels in *Forum for Social Economics* (26.2) in 1997. As to domestic research in *Moo*, almost nothing has been done except for one article written by He Yue Min published in *Modern Literary Magazine* (No.4) in 1998, which gives a general introduction to the novel. Another scarce phenomenon is that although many environmental ethics are involved in the novel, few researches have been done from an ecocritical standpoint except that Neil Nakadate partly touches some ecological issues in his book *Understanding Jane Smiley*. As we can see, it is still of great necessity to advance the researches in Smiley's *Moo*, especially from an ecocriticism perspective.

Mainly from the angles of ecocriticism and ecofeminism, the paper intends to dig out the ecological philosophy revealed in the novel through an analysis of those human and non-human characters, all of whom are inseparable components of the novel. The first chapter is an introduction; the second chapter focuses on the novel's complex structure with decentralized characters and plots; the third chapter deals with the interrelatedness in several animal-human relation cases in the novel; the fourth chapter analyses both the interrelatedness between earth members and digs out some elements in conflict mainly from the forest-saving story in the novel; the last part will draw a conclusion and summarizes the ecological ideologies reflected in the book. The paper finds out that through a depiction of the interrelations between humans and humans, humans and nonhumans, nonhumans and nonhumans, etc., *Moo* presents a web of life with countless equally important but diversified members interrelated with one another. The immoderate greed for boundless profits and the ignorance of the diversity and interrelatedness of the web of life will definitely lead to the adversity and final destruction of human beings.

## 1. AN ECOSYSTEM-LIKE DECENTRALIZATION IN *MOO*

In *Moo*, numerous characters are interrelated with one another in several interweaving threads of stories. More

than 70 characters are involved in the total 70 chapters of *Moo*, among whom over 20 play main roles, including a VIP (Very Important Pig, in fact.)—a Landrace boar named Earl Butz. Following several key threads, all the stories take place in this land-grant agriculture university. One thread is about the fate of the hog Earl and his friendship with Bob Carlson, a work-study student assigned by Dr. Bo Jones with a task of tending Earl every day to see how big the hog might grow if allowed to eat at will for all of his natural lifespan; another thread is about the secret collaboration between Dr. Lionel Gift, the professor of economics who always calls students "customers" and a billionaire Arlen Martin in a plan of digging some gold mine under the largest remaining virgin cloud forest in Central America, which is located in Costa Rica, and the later saving cloud forest mainly under the help of Chairman X (the chairman of the horticulture department), Timothy Monahan (a novelist of three books, professor of English, teaching fiction writing), Mrs. Loraine Walker (the senior secretary of the provost with great authority and influence after working in Moo U. for over 20 years), Cecelia Sanchez (assistant professor of foreign languages and teacher of Spanish), and many other people; the third thread is around the bovine false pregnancy project resulting in calf-free-lactation conducted by Dean Jellinek who works in Animal Science and is extremely crazy for cloning, which is increasingly resisted by his girlfriend Joy Pfisterer, a teacher in Equine Management, who loves the horses so much; the fourth thread is around an advanced planting machine invented by an 80 year old experienced farmer Loren Stroop, who distrusts the FBI, the CIA, and the big agriculture businesses so much that he wants to entrust his invention to Moo University that is supposed to give him agriculture assistance under the Morrill Act, as a result of which he keeps on writing letters and visiting the university without seeing the person in charge—Nils Harstad (the dean of agriculture extension) until one and a half years later, for at the beginning Nils wrongly estimates that Loren might have some mental problems. Ironically in the end the invention saves Moo U. timely from a dilemma caused by the policy of greatly slashing the state budget proposed by Governor Orville T. Early; the fifth thread is around the love and affairs between those main characters and even between two horses. Actually, not only do these threads interweave with one another, but human and nonhuman roles are interrelated with one another throughout the novel, which will be further examined in the next two chapters. Consciously or unconsciously these characters exert influence on one another, from human to human, from human to animals, from human to plants, and vice versa. All the human and nonhuman members compose Moo University, which is an emblem of even a larger system—a web of life. Finally pierced through a seeming jumble of characters and plots, *Moo* presents an ecosystem-like picture where

all the earlier chaos and complexity logically connect so as to reveal some truth about Nature to the reader. In essence, the decentralization of characters and plots in *Moo* is an aesthetic of relinquishment, which often appears in such environmental non-fiction that “takes as its starting point the decision to focus on the nonhuman, it tends to deny itself some of the basic aesthetic pleasures of homocentrism: plot, characterization, lyric pathos, dialogue, intersocial events, and so on” (Buell, 1995, p.168). And the instability of persona in *Moo*, including a displacement of humans and animals, opens a window for the reader to peer into an unfamiliar world of the nonhuman so as to build a direct bridge for people to cross through to the consciousness of other creatures. This, in a way, is definitely the aesthetic of relinquishment that “implied, rather, suspension of ego to the point of feeling the environment to be at least as worthy of attention as oneself and of experiencing oneself as situated among many interacting presences” (Buell, 1995, p.178). In truth, the interrelationships between the characters in *Moo* is exactly an exhibition of the interrelatedness of a web of life in nature. The following chapter will further expound on the interrelationships between animals and humans in the novel.

## 2. ANIMALS AND THEIR HUMAN PARTNERS

Animals and their human cohabitants have close interrelationships with each other in *Moo*. Different human characters have different relations to nonhuman characters. Through a description of the diversified interactions between animals and humans, Smiley implies her ecological ideologies to the reader.

In Smiley’s fictions, animals often have names, minds and personalities, such as in *Barn Blind* (1980) and *Horse Heaven* (2000), not to mention her series of young adult novels about horses. It is the same with the animals in *Moo*. As a matter of fact, personally, Smiley has been keeping a very close contact with animals, esp. horses since her childhood. She raises several dogs and many horses, which doubtlessly give her an insight into animals and animal-human relationship as well. In fact, the personification of nature has a long history in literature, where it has undergone ups and downs in different periods. In his book *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing and the Formation of American Culture*, Buell mentions that

The continued spread of humanitarian attitudes toward nature, especially domestic animals, and the technological and informational advances in visual and literary representation of natural history had produced a new genre in which creatures figured as protagonists in fictional narratives much more documentary and localized than the beast tales of traditional Aesopian allegory and folklore. (Buell, 1995, p.195)

Though animals are not the only protagonists in *Moo*, they share the same importance as humans.

Since *Moo University* is an agriculture university, animals are an indispensable part for the whole system, just as the other cohabitants in the university. Essential as these animals are, different human members hold different attitudes: Some have a craze for knowing more about animals with no personal affection, like Dr. Bo Jones; some think highly of human intelligence and science, trying to maximize profits by manipulating and making full use of animals, like Dean Jellinek; some treat animals as their close friends and take care of them with heart and soul, like Bob, Joy and Keri; the others show contempt to animals, such as Arlen Martin and Dr. Lionel Gift. Among these various attitudes, a sharp contrast has been formed in many episodes of the novel, esp. in two cases: One case is about Earl Butz and the other case is related to Dean Jellinek’s animal science research projects. Both the two stories contain huge ecological implications.

The first case is concerned with Earl Butz. Some critics regard Earl as an ironic symbol. Shine once mentions: “As a metaphor for the intrinsic corruption of the modern university, not to mention society at large, a pig is about crudely satirical as you can get” (Shine, 1995, p.38). According to Nakadate, Earl Butz is the blissfully obvious embodiment of consumer capitalism: “The catastrophic fate of the Landrace hog—a disoriented, panic-stricken, indulgence-driven demise—is Smiley’s representation of what awaits a bloated consumerist humanity” (Nakadate, 2010, p.135). One evidence is that the swine is granted with the same name “Earl Butz” as a former American Secretary of Agriculture whose policies favor large-scale corporate farming. There’s no denying that in the novel, such desires of getting more and achieving more no matter in what kinds of aspects are what Smiley intends to disclose: Dean Jellinek’s strong desire to harvest reputation and profits on cows through bioscience; Chairman X’s unquenchable sexual lust for young colleague Cecelia despite the fact that he already has two children with Lady X; the nationally-well-known economist Dr. Lionel Gift’s greed to gain more and more money through cooperation with billionaires, etc. On the surface, Earl seems to hold the similar image of greediness as those humans, for he eats all day long. Nevertheless, Smiley defends the boar in a humorous way:

Earl’s business, which was eating, only eating, and forever eating. ...Earl Butz was a good worker, who applied himself to his assigned task with both will and enjoyment. Already today he had cleaned the back end of his trough, and now he was working industriously toward the front.... (Smiley, 2009, p.4)<sup>1</sup>

“At bottom, he was still the hog he had always been,

<sup>1</sup> All the quotations from the novel in this paper come from the version: Smiley, Jane. *Moo*. New York: Anchor Books, 2009; hereafter the quotations from the novel will be marked only by page number.

the hog he was bred to be, and he was bred to eat. That was his genius and his burden" (p.267). It's natural for pigs to eat, but humans often attach labels to animals simply according to their appearance and habits. In fact, Earl acts more as a new perspective for the reader to revalue animals as well as humans than an embodiment of greediness and consumerism. In different people's eyes, Earl's significance varies. For example, in Dr. Bo Jones' opinions, hogs are the objects for him to research in historical and scientific senses only. No emotions are involved. His ambition can be found in his own words—"...When I die, they're going to say that Dr. Bo Jones found out something about hog" (p.5). Dr. Bo can talk about hogs during the whole dinner with his friends but all the talk is about some knowledge rather than personal feelings. He can follow the statistics recorded by his student on Earl's weight, size or some other index numbers without any face-to-face contact. By contrast, the sophomore Bob has an intimate relationship with the hog. Bob goes to the "Old Meats" building to visit Earl five times a day and takes care of the swine in such a cautious way: He changes the straw in the pen, cleans and fills the feed trough, empties and refills Earl's water reservoir, and scratches Earl's back with a stick. Besides, Bob purchases some toys for Earl to play, turns on radio for him, and chats with him. Bob feels more comfortable with Earl than he does with anyone else he has met since his coming to the university. Even in the face of his girlfriend Diane's comments at the first sight of Earl—"God, he's so fat. I mean, look at the rolls (p.188)!", Bob defends Earl at once by answering her: "You don't have to insult him" (Ibid.). Approaching the end of the story, when Earl is on the verge of being buried accidentally by the fallen walls pulled down by clamshell buckets, Bob rushes into the spot to look for Earl at the risk of his own life, though Bob's rescue turns out to be an effort in vain. However, the interactions between Earl and Bob or some other personages are not just presented from human perspective alone. Instead, a good many descriptions are from Earl Butz's side, an animal perspective. For example, Earl has affection for Bob but not for Diane. "He looked at the wall in preference, and also lets down a pointed stream of urine. Diane said, 'Yuck,' just as if an intelligent animal like Earl couldn't hear and understand her distaste. He grunted" (Ibid.). On the contrary,

He was happy to see Bob. It went beyond the eating, and the care, and even scratching. To tell the truth, Earl Butz had gotten attached to Bob, almost dependent on him. He appreciated his relaxed and considerate ways, and he appreciated the respect and fondness he sensed that Bob felt for him. (p.268)

For all those harmonious moments spent with Bob, Earl feels increasing pains in his body and limbs due to a lack of exercises in such a limited pen and too much food supply ordered by Dr. Bo Jones. The pains are the omen for Earl's final death. Due to a lack of fund for renovation, the Old Meats Building has to be demolished. However,

since Dr. Bo's project on the boar is carried out in secret from the beginning, no other faculty knows the existence of Earl. Therefore, when the bulldozers and cranes come to the building, neither Earl nor Bob is ready for that. Though Earl runs out of the broken walls and relics in time, he dies after running for a while on the freezing campus.

His shooting pains focused and concentrated themselves in his left foreleg, and then exploded deep in his chest. He took a labored, heaving breath, and suddenly jerked over onto his side. His whole body trembled. ... He gave another great shuddering breath that froze and hovered in the cold air, and then he closed his eyes. (pp.372-373)

The ironic thing is that in Earl's memory of his childhood, there's green pasture outside. However, when the chance of escaping comes and Earl finally runs out into the outside world, he finds that everything changes: "No, it was not green and fragrant, it was white and sterile" (p.371). This is an irony of ecology. What Earl confronts outside is far beyond his imagination. In the end, Earl Butz is after all a victim of Dr. Bo's experiment as well as the human world. Furthermore, the picture of bulldozers' and cranes' trampling on the garden in front of the Old Meats Building, tearing down the whole building, and driving out the animal is an echo of humans' exploitation of nature. It is also a typical image of "a machine breaking in a garden" discussed in Leo Marx's book *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*, symbolizing the intrusion into, the disruption and destruction of nature by technology and industrialization. As we can see, on the one hand, through a description of different people's reactions to Earl Butz, the characters' disposition and human nature are uncovered. On the other hand, through the adoption of animal perspective, the inner world of Earl Butz is exposed and arouses people's fresh feelings and understandings towards the hog and even many other animals. The narration from animal perspective is, to some extent, in accordance with Aldo Leopold's idea of "thinking like a mountain". Smiley undoubtedly agrees with Leopold on this aspect.

The second case concerns Dean Jellinek's animal science research. For Dean Jellinek, cows are something he has both the desire and capability of manipulating through biotechnology, for a fortune as well as for fame of course. He thinks highly of science instead of animals, just as what is mentioned in the story—"Dean had noticed that science was different from life in that in life much happened suddenly and in unexpected way, and in Dean's opinion, life was inferior to science in this respect" (p.295). No matter whether in his early efforts of cloning cows or in his later experiment on artificially inducing false pregnancy in cows for an unending lactation, Dean Jellinek neither respects animals' nature and rights, nor does he ever think of the latent dangerous consequences. His mind is full of such ideas as "You'd know how much a cow who never calved was worth, right to the dollar,

because you'd know ahead of time how many pounds of milk such a cow was going to produce over her lifetime" (p.94) or "...there's an incredible opportunity for profit here, too, because you would have to charge the farmer a great deal for his clone herd, a great deal for each animal, he would have to mortgage the herd..." (p.296). Conversely, his girlfriend Joy loves the horses she works with and appreciates their contribution to the equine course she teaches. All the horses have names: Brandy, King, Frenchman, and Tillie. On top of that, horses have their personalities and love. "Frenchman was a good-looking thoroughbred with some real talent for dressage, but love had made him distinctly less useful—he was always distracted by his attention to Tillie" (p.219). Her favorite horse is Brandy, so when Brandy later dies in an accident, it becomes such a shock for Joy that she almost chills herself to death after running out into a snowy evening without any outer garments. Joy can't help imagining how Brandy has possibly felt the moments before her death. Doubtlessly she has a reverence for life. That's why she disagrees with Dean Jellinek at the beginning of the project and gets more and more vexed because the project is against her understanding of life and against life as well.

All those cows with the same pattern of black and white, all turning their heads at the same time, all mooing in unison (his first love is still cloning) and all feeling pregnant when they were not, didn't seem to be an image she could hold in her head along with the rest of what she knew about life. (p.96)

Although science plays a crucial part in modern society, it brings crises and dangers together with material gains, just like Ernst Bloch's assertion that "where technology has achieved an apparent victory over the limits of nature... the coefficient of known, and, more significantly, unknown danger has increased proportionately" (Bloch, 2001, p.41). Through the story of Dean Jellinek's ambitious biotechnological project, Smiley reminds people of the pros and cons of technology, and calls the reader's attention to animal ethics.

As we can see, both the two cases reflect the interrelations between animals and humans. By describing people's greatly different attitudes toward animals, and also by presenting the stories from animal perspective, *Moo* better our understanding of animals and helps the reader to rethink animals' significance in the world.

### 3. THE SALVATION OF VIRGIN CLOUD FOREST IN COSTA RICA

In addition to a revelation of animal-human relationship, *Moo* also covers many other ecological issues, one of which is about the salvation of the largest virgin cloud forest in the hemisphere. The danger of the cloud forest in Costa Rica derives from the billionaire Arlen Martin's

plan of digging gold mine under the cloud forest. For some Moo University faculty members, Martin is already notorious for his insistence on applying a problematic chicken experiment into practice because he doesn't want to invest in vain after giving Moo University a grunt for the purpose of investigating the health effects on chickens of a diet made up partially of dead chicken offal. The study later shows that both the eggs and the killed carcasses of the chickens on Martin diet show higher levels of salmonella contamination that could not be satisfactorily controlled by antibiotics also added to the feed. Martin still gains great profits from the investment anyway. This time Martin comes to the university again for cooperation. Dr. Lionel Gift is one of his cooperators found in the university, helping Martin to design a concrete blueprint since Dr. Gift has many friends in Costa Rica on account of his reputation in the economics field. Both Martin and Gift prioritize benefits most and neglect all the other factors. Dr. Gift believes firstly that

all men, not excluding himself, had an insatiable desire for consumer goods and that it was no coincidence that what all men had an insatiable desire for was known as 'goods,' for goods were good, which was why all men had an insatiable desire for them. (p.31)

Besides being a professor in Moo U., Dr. Gift is also an economic consultant for the Costa Rica government. The development of Costa Rica, the rising GDP, those symbols of modernization and urbanization are what Dr. Gift cares about, rather than the preservation of resources in nature. Different from Dr. Gift, Chairman X responsible for horticulture department loves nature so much. After Dr. Gift's public lecture on Costa Rica's development, Chairman X challenges Dr. Gift by asking "What have been the effects of this development on Costa Rica's natural biological systems?" (p.69) Dr. Gift's interest is around money, but Chairman X's concern is on environment: "The hole in the ozone was growing; a thousand species a day were falling into extinction" (p.118);

They have scarlet macaws there, did you know that? The only other place in the world that serves as a habitat for scarlet macaws is in New Guinea, and that habitat will be gone by 2005 if the Japanese don't stop cutting down the hardwoods there. Have you ever seen a scarlet macaw? (p.264)

Besides Chairman X, Mrs. Walker and her girlfriend Martha also have such ecological worries and clearly point out the crisis a gold mine will bring:

While gold mining is admittedly stressful to the environment in a number of ways, it is the opinion of this writer that environmental impact assessments will show that it should take a hundred years or less for the area in question to recover from the necessary impacts of mining....Then the ore oxidizes and sulfur compounds dissolve into sulfuric acid, and THAT runs into the groundwater. Very problematic. (pp.204-205)

Compared with America, some countries like Costa Rica in the Third World don't have sufficient environmental

regulations to protect their forests, water, air, and land. As a result, many mining companies move to the Third World. However, no matter on which region where a destruction of environment takes place, the ecological crisis is by no means only limited to the region but will definitely spread to the whole globe sooner or later. The protection of the earth is in need of the universal efforts across the world. That's why a lot of characters in the novel get together to save the last virgin cloud forest in Costa Rica: Mrs. Walker probes into the matter first and purposefully leaks out the news of Martin's scheme of goldmining to the whole campus; a protest rally of students and some faculty members is formed under the leadership of Chairman X; an article that questions the goldmining plan is put on the front of a local newspaper with the efforts of Professor Timothy Monahan; Cecelia connects with Costa Rica's minister of environment in a roundabout way....The interrelatedness among these characters is very well presented through their uniform efforts in the salvation of the cloud forest in Costa Rica. In addition, the interrelatedness of the cloud forest in Costa Rica and American citizens is another case in point to show that nature is a web of life with all the plants and creatures interacting with one another. As for the interrelatedness in this web of life, Plumwood comments that

A world perceived in communicative and narrative terms is certainly far richer and more exciting than the self-enclosed world of meaningless and silent objects exclusionary, monological and commodity thinking creates, reflecting back to us only the echo of our own desires. (Plumwood, 2002, pp.230-231)

While approving of those characters' efforts in saving the cloud forest, Smiley doesn't forget to dig deeper into the issue and finds out what are the challenges the environment faces. One crucial influence is from the state government, represented by Governor Early who stands with Arlen Martin and Dr. Gift. After the protesting demonstration, Governor Early orders a further financial cutback on Moo University. Chairman X is, consequently, dismissed from the chairman position. However, the gloomy fate of the university is reversed owing to the invention of a planting machine bestowed by farmer Loren after his death. The invention, without any doubt, will bring a large sum of profits for the university and the state after it's applied to the agriculture industry. In consequence, the governor immediately abrogates his former order of budget deduction, and thus University Moo is saved. It's hardly difficult to sense an ironic tone from the story. Behind those increasing ecological crises lie both an individual propensity and a social trend for boundless material gains, just like Marx observes:

The more a country proceeds from large-scale industry as the background of its development, as in the case of the United States, the more rapid is this process of destruction. Capitalist production, therefore, only develops the techniques and the degree of combination of the social process of production by simultaneously undermining the original sources of all wealth—the soil and the worker. (Marx, 1990, p.365)

As we can see, the salvation of Costa Rica's cloud forest stands as a vital story across *Moo*, in that lots of characters and events are interrelated just like a web of life, and many ecological concerns are disclosed in the story.

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## CONCLUSION

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To sum up, just as the description of the harmonious variety of exuberant plants in the horticulture garden in front of Old Meats Building at the beginning of the story, Smiley emphasizes the diversity of nature and the interrelations between different plants and creatures on the earth. Although the cloud forest in Costa Rica has been saved in the story, the prospect for the environment is not optimistic at all. The deaths of Earl Butz and Brandy as well as the destruction of the horticulture garden and the Old Meats Building are just the warnings from nature. Any excessive greed for limitless profits and any neglect of the interrelatedness and diversity in all life in nature will lead to doom and destruction for human beings in the future. After all, humans are just one member of this web of life.

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Clatworthy, Jane Hinds, Joe and M. Camic, Paul 2013. Gardening as a mental health intervention: a review. *Mental Health Review Journal*, Vol. 18, Issue. Still participating after all these years: a study of life task participation in later life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71, 6, 1235-49. Havighurst, R. J. 1961. An exploration of the Activity Theory of Aging: activity types and life satisfaction among in-movers to a retirement community. *Journal of Gerontology*, 27, 4, 511-23. \*Lennartsson, C. and Silverstein, M. 2001. Eco-proverb is an aspect of eco-critical study which falls under the ambit of. ecocriticism theory. Eco-critical theory attempts to find a meeting point between. literature and the environment. The tenets of eco-criticism revolve around the. of life. Its author is generally unknown else it will be a quotation. Proverbs are. The study of proverbs has application in a number of. fields. Those who study folklore and literature explore the proverb for its cultural. See more of Jane Smiley on Facebook. Log In. or. In this darkly satirical send-up of academia and the Midwest, we are introduced to Moo University, a distinguished institution devoted to the study of agriculture. Amid cow pastures and waving fields of grain, Moo's campus churns with devious plots, mischievous intrigue, lusty liaisons, and academic one-upmanship, Chairman X of the Horticulture Department harbors a secret fantasy to kill the dean; Mrs. Walker, the provost's right hand and campus information queen, knows where all the bodies are buried; Timothy Monahan, associate professor of English, advocates eavesdropping. Wonderfully written and masterfully plotted, MOO gives us a wickedly funny slice of life.