



Has Humanity Systematically Set About Sabotaging the Natural World it Claims to Enshrine: Unpacking an Oxymoron, ‘Kindness’ and ‘Cruelty’ in George Saunders’s Dark Comic Animal Fable, *Fox 8*

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Abstract: This paper intends to dredge into the sad reality of the two different worlds, the human world and second, the world of animals. By the end of this research, one can truly examine and realize how humanity is methodically setting forth to destroy the natural world that all cherish. No wonder the short story of Saunders *Fox 8* is called a dark honorific animal fable. The unpacking of the oxymoron, ‘kindnesses and ‘cruelty’ both are well balanced in the story narrated and experienced by Fox 8. The fable outburst the brutality, irony, sarcasm, and dark sense of humor by George Saunders. Saunders aims to enlighten and awaken the anguish, pang, and misery of those unspeakable. The primary aim of the research is to throw light upon the significant factors that every human should inculcate, starting from responsibility, and kindness, to portray the destructive and massive effects of cruelty. This is where the question arises, what if animals could speak, there would indeed be peace, mutual understanding, and harmony in the world. For instance, the protagonist, Fox 8, is depicted as kind and selfless which are worthy of praise in the readers' view. Saunders has vividly illustrated in the book *Fox 8* so that an amateur can visualize and empathize with the unspeakable. After the reader completes reading and examining this particular piece by Saunders, one would certainly wish not to be a human in the next birth. Chelra Cardinal, an artist, wishes in her next life, if things are up to her, she would wish to be a fox.

Index Terms- Animal, Human beings, Brutality, Empathy, Irony, Jeopardy, Dark comic fable.

George Saunders is an American short story writer, he also writes essays, novellas, and books for children, but in 2017 he attempted his debut novel *Lincoln in the Bardo*. In the novel for which he won ‘The Man Booker Prize’ in 2017, Saunders was born on 2nd December 1958 in the United States, in Amarillo Texas. He is a college professor at Syracuse University U.S. The collection of short stories is extremely powerful and a serious thing to think about. He incites readers to understand further happenings in the story through their anticipation. His notable collections which I will be exploring through this research are; *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* (1996), *Pastoralia* (2000), *The Very Persistent Gappers of Frip* (2000), *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil* (2005), *In Persuasion Nation* (2006), *The Braindead Megaphone* (2007), *Tenth of December*, (2012), *Fox 8*(2013), *Congratulations by the Way: Some Thoughts on Kindness*(2014), *Lincoln in the Bardo* (novel)(2017), and his notable awards: MacArthur Fellowship, 2006, PEN/Malamud Award 2013, Folio Prize 2017 The stories he invents is quite uncooperative, the reader at first discovers the stories somewhat bizarre and unusual but the concepts he brings to light is so true and undeniable.

Though *Fox 8* is considered to be a children’s short story few critics and readers disregard the concept of limiting to only kids. The best thing about this book is that young students from a very early age will be alert and alarmed by the truth of life and the bitter experiences of other living creatures and unspeakable things. This lesson can enlighten and provide a sense of realization for not repeating the brutal actions of humans towards animals. On the other hand, this book cannot be limited to children; rather every individual regardless of whichever age they belong to, is truly significant to all for it is high time they realize and empathize. *Fox 8* is a curious asset and a kind of daydreamer. A reader, in the beginning, might be awestruck by an animal being able to speak. This is the reason Saunders has created the story as a fairy tale with a high inner recollection through the narration and the story of a fox, Saunders is skillfully drawing attention from the people to witness how kind and cruel human beings can be. The animal *Fox* spends a long time at night hiding outside houses and listening to children’s bedtime stories, therefore, he has learned to speak human language.

At the beginning of the book, a reader feels quite satisfactory for mistaking the story as a happy-go merry animal fable, but as the pages turn, people witness not only the brutal fiction but a sad reality that all can never deny.

In some or the other place, every human has faced such. The most horrifying image in the book is the suiting and stoning of the fox 7 for fun and laughter, or entertainment for humans, “further hits with their hats, and kits and stomps, while making adishunal noises (additional). I had never herd (heard) a Yuman (Human) make, as if this is fun” (Saunders 31). Before anyone goes further to examine the brutality, one should make one thing very clear spellings of the terms might be phonetically correct according to pronunciation but these words, one can find errors in the grammatical spellings because as mentioned earlier Fox 8 has learned to speak ‘Yuman’ humans therefore it’s his words and his narration which Saunders has depicted very well.

Disheartening to hear what Fox 8 says later in the fable, when he encounters a tense situation, when he sees his best pal being tortured and killed brutally, Fox 8 says, he had never heard such stories outside the window of the human houses during eavesdropping the bedtime stories. Saunders wants his readers to feel ashamed of what humans do to other creatures, especially how they treat animals. “I had herd many storys at that window but never had I herd a story in which anything like what happened to pore Fox 7 happened” (32). Here lies the irony that Saunders has emphasized to depict remorse and agony from the other side of the world. Furthermore, to describe the mentality of Fox 8, he compares their good times and the worst times. In comparison with Fox 7’s death, he informs that the foxes hit by cans didn’t seem much worse, “ I did not know Fox cud look that way” (32). The readers could clearly understand how the death image of Fox 7 appeared, horrific and devastating. Therefore, Fox 8 says he has seen many deaths caused by humans but this particular one was difficult to believe his eyes. This statement by Fox 8 is a serious word to examine, how pathetic, is a human learning these words from animals? The animals are fundamentally regarded as the species to be away from, to fear, and considered as harmful and infidelity Saunders lets human beings ponder upon such an ironical scenario where animals are to be regarded as treason rather not humans. Therefore, Saunders tries to open the eyes of every individual in this real world to probe into this satire. To make it more satirical, Saunders has given an interesting start to his fable Fox 8, with an apology from the fox. “First may I say, Sorry for any words I spel rong. Because I am a fox!” (3).

One day Fox 8, while walking, stopped by the house to listen to the stories from the window. It was a bedtime story that he took an interest in initially, but quite upsetting when he heard about foxes which were false and mean. Foxes are sly, they trick chickens and fill their stomach. The fox gets disappointed. “But one nite I herd something that made me think twice about Yumans” (humans) (4). Fox 8 claims that they are very honest and open with chickens.

They probably have a ‘Super Fare Deal’. Chickens make eggs, foxes take the eggs, take more eggs, and sometimes even eat a chicken. The question here lies that they should take permission to feed themselves or consent to satisfy their hunger. Saunders emphasizes this matter about foxes, eggs, and chickens so that every individual under the sun should examine what humans talk about and the false bedtime stories. ‘Foxes eating chickens and taking away the eggs’, Saunders induces his readers to examine the irony lying in these bedtime stories and the fable. Humans talking about foxes being sly and cunning eating off chickens so what are the human beings doing? Are humans not taking the eggs? Humans usually like pointing at others and the blame given is the easiest one. Saunders also touches on the theme of hypocrisy.

Fox 8 further narrates his experiences, one of the tragic incidents that usually takes place in the real world. Once he was astonished to witness a sudden huge smoke and fire in their homelands (jungle). In human language, it’s called deforestation. “Developers cut down the wood and Fox has to flee, through the landscapes of mawls and roads ... It’s a story that can and will be read by children, but it’s also a book of deep complex truths” (Preston 2018). The forest i.e. their living place was being destroyed by human beings to construct shopping malls and other amusements. Is this not sly and cruel? the fox ponders sadly. Fox 8 and his pal Fox 7 went fetching food and while returning with food for themselves and other foxes, there was another calamity/ adversity that Fox 8 witnessed and this time, brutally atrocious. While returning they encountered a few men working with some tools and spades with blue caps like a helmet. They started hurting these foxes throwing their caps on them. Fox 7 gets injured and isn’t able to escape. Fox 8, with difficulties, was watching how those men heartlessly wounded his friend Fox 7, hitting him with tools, picking up his limbs, and flinging far away for it is dead and this creates fun and laughter for the human. Fox 8 probes and is alarmed to what extent human beings can go vicious. Fox 8 rushes to his friend’s body and checks he is dead and this disappoints Fox 8 for a long period. He couldn’t forget all those mishappenings easily, and neither could eat nor sleep well.

The days passed and Fox 8 started recovering mentally with other animals. He now sees a very different place full of trees, flowers, the season of blooming and new friends, a new family, but the misfortunes that he had a long time ago were haunting him frequently. Fox 8 had a different motive for long, he was planning to write a letter to the humans. A letter filled with questions, astonishment, sorrow, advice, and love. Fox 8 writes in a letter humbly telling the humans that what they do or they have done, there surely might be some explanation and reasons behind it, Fox

8 would have to know what is it. “If you Yumans wud take one bit of advise from a meer Fox? By now I know that you Yumans like your storys to end hapy? If you want your storys to end happy, try being niser” (48,49). Fox 8 at the end of the letter adds, that he awaits the answer, the answer from the humans. Leaving the letter under the bird feeder and requesting humans to reply to the letter and leave their responses at the same place. Therefore, the story Fox 8 ends with a message that is almost comically sincere yet a kind of advice that humans need at the very moment. The best line – if you want to be happy, be nicer.

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