



ECOFEMINISM AND THE NATURAL WORLD IN TONI MORRISON'S *GOD HELP THE CHILD*

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the novel *God Help The Child* by Toni Morrison (2015) from an ecofeminist perspective in order to explore how gender, race, and nature intersect with one another. Based on the way she represents women characters within the novel and how they relate with the natural world, this study discloses the delicate nature of Morrison's ecofeminism evidenced in ideas like body as landscape, motherhood inherent in nature, and environmental healing. The point of this paper is that Morrison reinforces and challenges traditional ecofeminist perspectives at the same time, making this work a unique contribution through its intersectionality. It not only offers new insights into Morrison's last work but also demonstrates that the ecofeminist approach still has something to say about contemporary African American literature. This study contributes to the understanding of modern literary contexts that involve feminism, environmentalism, and racial justice with a particular focus on the differential effects of eco-feminism criticism on complex social and environmental issues.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Ecocriticism, Toni Morrison, God help the child, Nature

I. Introduction

Francoise d'Eaubonne, a French feminist came up with the idea of ecofeminism in the 1970s. This movement

has its roots in both philosophy and politics; it combines environmental issues with feminism (Ajani, 2023). Basically, ecofeminism argues that there are

profound relationships between the domination of nature and women's oppression (Gaard and Murphy, 1998). Consequently, this concept supports the argument that patriarchal societies which tend to marginalize women and nature have been responsible for gender inequality as well as environmental degradation (Kings, 2017).

Ecofeminism has different orientations such as cultural ecofeminism which emphasizes the biological ties between women and nature, while social ecofeminism examines how gender is socially constructed thereby leading to environmental concerns (Alaimo, 2000). In literature, eco-feminist criticism views texts from the perspective of their representations of connections between women and land. Such critics often highlight themes of exploitation, nurturing, resilience, etc. (Plumwood, 1996).

II. Literature Review

A. Introduction to Toni Morrison and *God Help the Child*

She was born in Ohio in 1931 and she rose to prominence after winning a Nobel Prize for her work. The author has created some very moving narratives about being black or female, particularly within America's border. Toni Morrison won the Nobel Prize for her brilliant stories about African-American life especially those concerning women. Her novels include *Beloved*, *The Bluest Eye*, and *Song of*

Solomon which have become classic pieces of contemporary American literary theory (Wyatt, 2017). As Smith would also add, "concerning the attitudes to nature, it remains to notice that Morrison is not only most vivid and rich in describing nature but also uses it as symbolic space indicating the nature of characters' psyche and their social reality" (Smith, 2023). According to Smith, it's important to see that Morrison's nature is not merely a stage; it represents the characters' concerns with race, gender, and violence giving the reader a rather complicated perspective on the relations between society and nature (Krumholz, 2014).

B. Article Statement

Toni Morrison's twelfth novel, published in 2015, is titled *God Help the Child*. The story in this novel is about a character named Bride, a young woman who has been quite successful and whose life experiences are closely tied to the darkness of her skin color - which is an extraordinarily dark rejection from her mother. Thematically the novel is very much about childhood trauma, race, and identity, and was peppered with a magical realism that allowed us to gauge its relevance on more than just our mortal scenes (Ajani, 2023). If not quite as pointedly historical in focus as some of Morrison's earlier works, *God Help the Child* still presents an arresting reflection on how the past extends into a present built



largely around issues like race and gender (Wyatt, 2017).

III. Female Resilience and Nature's Influence in *God Help the Child*

Toni Morrison's recent work *God Help the Child* provides a spectrum of ecofeminist issues; inextricably linked to race and gender, as well as being juxtaposed with elements from nature expounding new possibilities they can add or subtract when repositioned in traditional ecologically feminist worldviews. "She was black as night, Sudanese black. Startling in its announcement of darkness..." (Morrison, 2015, p. 3).

The description graphically paints the picture of the protagonist Bride and underscores prejudice of skin colour in the offered society. This line... brings out the struggle of how Bride's dark bawdiness and prop-like body symbolize survival, yet is a field of battle over reclaiming the primitive and human. Through the employment of such imagery, Morrison seeks to capture the potential of black women who are at the received and receiver end as far as the racial outlook is concerned (Kings, 2017). Morrison is a particularly interesting ecofeminist writer in that the very bodies and lives of her female characters, their relationship to mothering, or not-mothering (and other forms of resignification spawned by ecological precarity), reflects on ways we might relate differently to our nature as species subjected under severe

environmental mutilation (Warren, 1997). This approach to thematics is significant in the sense that it not only helps disclose how closely connected are oppression of women is and its inclination to nature but also illuminates ways for healing, empowerment energetics by coming back in touch with natural surroundings. This paper seeks to demonstrate how ecofeminism can be employed as a method to better understand the nuances of environmental themes in Morrison's work by closely reading *God Help the Child*. Some of its female characters - like Lula and Sweetness, two old friends tearing at one another over the former's unwelcome childlessness or Bride herself irrevocably disconnected from (though she still adores) her man - are as richly rendered that Morrison has managed in years (Hoving, 2017).

IV. The Interplay of Motherhood and Nature

Motherhood is another core theme of the novel, which is closely entwined with nature motifs and ecological topics in Morrison's 'God Help the Child'. Motherhood is depicted as a form of link between women and nature, and, in some occasions, a rather tense one. This is most illustrated in the bond between Bride and her mother. What can be considered one of the most unusual features, childbirth is depicted as a biological process in which a woman becomes a mother through the act of giving birth.

"It's not my fault. It's not my fault. I'm not the one. I'm not the one. It's not my fault. So you can't blame me" (Morrison, 2015, p. 43).

The line reflects the strained relationship between Bride and her mother, Sweetness. This phrase determines the effort, which Sweetness undertakes to justify the treatment of the daughter and the shifting of the guilt, as well as a denial of any expectation of a bond between a mother and a child. Here is a deep emotional gap, which raises the many and complex layers of the idea of mothering in the story where mothering is sometimes alienated from affection or acceptance (Gaard and Murphy, 1998).

As is the case with most of Mothers' novels, the subject of natural womanhood over the constructed one is well represented in this novel. Sweetness's rejection of her black-skinned daughter is interpreted as a rejection of nature in favor of the societal framework over blood relations (Hoving, 2017). This conflict between the culture's demands and one's primal desires is characteristic of ecofeminism, as it is a result of patriarchal societies that force women to disconnect from the environment and their biology. This work: 'Finally, the trees seemed to know everything she thought or felt' (Morrison, Page 158). Here, nature is also used as an aspect of symbolizing inner feelings, which suggestively means that

women have closeness to nature (Hoving, 2017).

At the same time, the novel opens other opportunities related to the concept of motherhood, which can also be viewed as a means of regaining connection with nature. When she starts pondering the idea of becoming a mother herself, Bride sensationalizes her body as well as its potential or capacity. This change of thinking also conforms to the ecofeminists' proclamation of appreciating female biology asserting that motherhood is the way through which women can fight oppression and get close to nature (Alaimo, 2000).

V. Exploring Toni Morrison's Ecofeminist Impact in Literature

Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child* coherently addresses race, gender, and environmental issues that are central to ecofeminist literature but set in the modern world. While many other texts that contribute to the discourse of ecofeminism tend to explore the realities of the white, middle class, Morrison's novel enriches the field with an intersectional approach (Kings, 2017). Thus, Morrison not only enriches the tradition of ecofeminism by highlighting how African-American women's experiences are mediated by their both gender and racial experiences, but she also extends the analysis of African American women's relationship to nature beyond the spheres of domesticity and environmental



preservation or destruction enacted by the male characters in African American literature (Warren, 1997).

The best way to understand how Morrison envisions the future of the relations between women and nature based on ecofeminist principles is to analyse her attitude to the body as the natural topography. In the course of the novel, she employs concrete, direct imagery to depict her characters' appearances and other aspects of their existence, implying that man and nature are interrelated (Gaard and Murphy, 1998). This technique also supports the idea stated by ecofeminists that all types of life are interconnected with each other, as well as complicates the definitions of what is natural and unnatural for the human body and actions.

Then, a shift toward the understanding of the healing process by becoming one with nature is valuable to Morrison's contribution to the canon of ecofeminist literature. While other writers paint a rather pessimistic picture of the environment by depicting the non-human world as a hostile and destructive force, Morrison offers a completely different vision of the world, where the strength of nature contributes to the female characters' rejuvenation. However, with this hopeful view, Morrison's uncompromised depiction of the complex issues brings a rich

discussion of posthumanist ecofeminist literature into literary studies.

In this section, the author examines the literary criticism, which is framed around an ecofeminist perspective of Toni Morrison's novel *God Help the Child* to identify interrelated concepts. The various female characters depicted by Morrison, especially Bride, convey raw and natural allure with the help of nature imagery used for the description of physical attributes as well as an encouragement to respect nature. The novel is rich in the role of a body as the natural landscape and the critique of the standards of beauty, and at the same time, motherhood is depicted as various relationships with nature. More importantly, Morrison maps a positive relationship with the Earth as a salve and a way to recovery, particularly for characters that have been violated or submitted to.

Consequently, this study sheds light on the following future research directions: The cross-cultural research could be done to determine if the writer had improved on ecofeminist themes as portrayed in this novel as opposed to the previous novels or other African American writers of the same period. The representation of intersectional aspects in *God Help the Child* sheds more light on the desirability for more scholarly study on how race and gender along with the environment in literary works and especially the colored authors (Plumwood, 1996).

Given that the novel is placed in the contemporary world, it allows considering the presence of the ecofeminist topic in the novels which describe modern social and environmental concerns. Other viable areas of focus include the depiction of the natural world also as a site of cure as well as paragenesis of magical realism in relation to the concepts of nature and the feminine.

VI. Conclusion

Morrison's works engage cross-cultural and intersectional investigations of Black ecofeminist themes in contemporary literature. Additionally, making use of the issue of eco-Sophia in Morrison's books contributes to expanding the definitions of ecofeminist texts as the literature, which was initially more oriented toward white middle-class women. This research demonstrates that the culture of ecofeminism remains crucial and can be applied to modern problems. It contributes to the identified list of how environmental matters and nature motifs work within African American literature and the problems of identity and oppression.

Thus, an emphasis on ecofeminist interpretations of 'God Help the Child' not only enhances the comprehension of Morrison's versatility but also allows them to address the issues regarding the connection of gender, race, and environmental considerations in literature and culture. Thus, the present study

emphasizes the significance of ecofeminist approaches in studying modern literature and reflecting on today's environmental issues and concerns. As a result, this research fosters the interdisciplinary study of literature and environmental humanities since it combines ecofeminist theory, literary analysis, and African American studies, illustrating how storytelling can facilitate change in the spheres of social and environmental justice.

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