

# A Study on Women's Identification with Nature in *Gone with the Wind* from the Perspective of Eco-feminism

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**Abstract**—Eco-feminism argues that women and nature are interconnected with each other. So the identification of women with nature is the primary content of eco-feminism. This essay tries to study the interconnections between the main female characters and nature, and how women are naturalized and how nature is feminized from the perspective of eco-feminism, intending to reveal women's identification with nature in *Gone with the Wind*.

**Keywords**—eco-feminism; interconnection; nature; women's identification

## I. INTRODUCTION

Eco-feminist holds that the identification of women with nature is the primary content of eco-feminism. The first reason for women to be identified with nature lies in their unique physiological constitution — “The earth-body and the womb-body run on cosmological time” (Sprenak 181). Women's role of generating and raising offspring is similar to nature's cyclical reproductive process and its generosity of providing essential materials for people to sustain. Secondly, seen from the historical and social perspective, women and nature always have similar experience and fate to share in the patriarchal society. Carolyn Merchant (1992) in *The Death of Nature* points out that both women and nature has experienced the fate from being respected and worshiped in the prehistoric society to being devalued and dominated in the patriarchal society. In this sense, therefore, this intrinsic link endows women with a privilege to observe, sense and communicate with nature. This is also the reason why females exhibit more respect to and more reliance on nature.

## II. INTERCONNECTION BETWEEN WOMEN AND NATURE

Eco-feminists glorifies the relations between nature and women. In *Gone with the Wind*, the identification of women with nature is a dominant theme. The interrelation and interdependence between women and nature are mainly demonstrated by the two heroines: Scarlett and Ellen. With apparent inborn qualities, the two women incarnate a lot of the book's ecofeminist ideas such as worshiping the land, putting faith in the land, and developing a mutually dependent relationship with the land.

### A. Scarlett — the Spirit of Nature

Eco-feminists hold that women possess the attributes of nature and nature possesses the attributes of women. The novel starts with depicting the attractive appearance of Scarlett in terms of nature-related images: her eyes “were as green as the hills of Ireland”, and she is shining with her green dresses and green slippers. As her mother says, “Green is Scarlett's color.” (Mitchell 45). Metaphorically, the color “green” implies Scarlett's natural bond with nature here. Endowed with natural beauty and qualities of nature, Scarlett is viewed as a passionate lover for nature. As the author depicts, Scarlett's life has been interwoven with her homeland — Tara since she was a little girl. She loves climbing trees like a boy, walking in the open air and riding horses (ibid.: 7). In addition, she is an enthusiastic observer of the natural world and indulges herself in the magnificent scenery of Tara and its surrounding areas all the time. In the warm spring morning she loves standing by the window to “drink in the scents and sounds of Tara and she feels “she loved this land so much” (Mitchell 56). Before the civil war, for Scarlett, as an important ingredient of her luxurious happy life, the land of Tara means a perfect place to live on: the beauty of the land brings her great enjoyment and satisfaction.

Likewise, the land itself in *Gone with the Wind* is considered as a female character, sharing intimacy with the heroine, spiritually as well as physically. It also empowers her with mysterious strength. Scarlett's empowerment, in fact, lies in her intimate relationship with the red fields. So determined and intellectual as she is, she can never make any achievements until she really gets insight into the land. Different from her two sisters, who only see the fields as a tool to yield crops and cotton, she has her faith in it. Scarlett, to some extent, makes herself part of nature. The feature proves Scarlett's inborn link with nature—she is the “Spirit of Nature”.

It is at the Reconstruction period after the war that she commences undertaking an education in how to make a living on the land. The adventurous experience of fleeing Atlanta back to Tara intensifies Scarlett's sense of trust in Tara and she starts holding to her belief that she is capable of finding security and shelter from the land and nature.

Scarlett's intimate relationship with nature is reinforced gradually as she matures with nature. In spite of the most adverse environmental conditions after war makes Tara an area difficult for humans to live on, Scarlett is not discouraged by the hardships in her life. On the contrary, with firm belief in nature her fighting spirit is aroused and any difficulty or setback can be overcome. Therefore, it can be inferred that Scarlett develops an active and positive attitude towards nature. What's more important, Scarlett's identification with nature becomes intensified until at last she integrates herself with nature by pursuing self-reliance, putting faith in her intuition and being in awe of the laws of nature. There is a perfect harmony between nature and her. Apparently, Scarlett is an emblem symbolizing the Spirit of Nature.

### B. Ellen — the Mother Earth

Eco-feminists argue that the intimacy between women and nature is an essential ingredient of their mutual understanding and spiritual communication. The land, known as the Mother Earth, is also often compared to a mother who has an inborn ability to produce offspring, to nourish and soothe her children. Under Mitchell's pen, before the war the red land of Tara is so fertile and vigorous that a good harvest can be expected all the time. Here the legendary prototype of "the Mother Earth" comes into being. The red earth of Tara stands for vitality and tolerance, which keeps Scarlett company, offers her hope, and inspires her all the way.

Ellen, who shares all the similarities with the land, is depicted by Mitchell as a Goddess of Nature: Mother Earth. Before the war, it is Ellen who's in charge of the household at Tara. With her sensibility and affection for the land, Ellen is destined to identify herself with nature. Her plantation and houses that are orderly and delicately arranged, display her affection for the beauty of nature. All of that shows she lives a life intimate with nature and she respects nature with awe. With her divine power of healing, nourishing and mothering, she not only cures people's body but cures their soul as well, in some way. Ellen integrates herself into the image of the stereotypical Mother Earth with a tender, selfishless maternal presence.

During the war, Ellen does the physical work all day long and consumes the least to save food for the other family members, finally "undermining her strength and dies." Here, celebrated as the stereotypical Mother Earth, Ellen also resembles the devotion, tolerance and productivity of the earth itself. To Scarlett and any other person who knows her, Ellen, treated as the spiritual leader behind Tara, is the fountain of spiritual strength like the Mother Earth. Human beings never feel solitude but are showered with the great love of the Mother Earth. Here, the red earth is compared to mother for the first time, which is a metaphor to hint the identification of "mother" with the land.

In a viewpoint of eco-feminism, females can constantly derive healing power and even rebirth from nature. Thriving together with every life form in nature, they identify themselves with the earth. In this sense, Ellen and the land

are connected through a unique way: Ellen supports the whole family like the land of Tara while Tara provides everyone food and shelter as Ellen does. She integrates with nature and represents the selfishless spirit of the Mother Earth.

### III. THE FEMINIZED NATURE & NATURALIZED FEMALE

From an ecofeminist perspective, humans can see themselves in the mirror of Nature, so the integration of women and nature can also find its illustration in the naturalization of female characters and the feminization of nature.

Apart from close connection with the land, women are compared to other natural elements as well, such as flower, water, wind, forest and so on. In *Gone with the Wind*, Scarlett has "magnolia-white skin" (Mitchell 1); she is a simple person who can not understand any matter with any complexity: "Scarlett was as forthright and simple as the winds that blew over Tara" (ibid.: 17). In addition, many females are also compared to animals to be "naturalized". The Tarleton girls are "as unruly as colts and wild as March bares" (Mitchell 26). The married women "looked like a clump of fat crows" (ibid.: 35). Miss Pittypat, to her brother Peter, has "no more sense than a June bug" (ibid.: 126). To Scarlett, Melanie, is a mousy little person, while Wilke "had the odd lash-less look of a rabbit" (ibid.: 46).

Meanwhile, under Mitchell's pen, the feminine traits, such as tenderness, calmness, kindness and so on, also belongs to all the elements in nature. The plowed cotton fields are peaceful, placid and complacent under the sunshine. "The virgin forests are dark, cool, mysterious and a little sinister. The sighing pines seeming to wait with an age-old patience, to threaten with soft sighs... (Mitchell 4). Dynamic and vigorous, the red earth is an animated being: "The moist hungry earth, waiting upturned for the cotton seeds...The plantation clearings and miles of cotton fields smiled up to a warm sun, placid, complacent" (ibid.). As can be seen, nature is not non-human existence any more, but is upgraded to the same position as humanity.

Eco-feminists are concentrated on how women are portrayed as "natural", and how nature is portrayed as "feminine". The above exploration of the "feminized" nature and the "naturalized" female indicates the interconnection between women and nature. And this close link reveals that females are part of nature and they can never be set apart from nature just as trees cannot be separated from the soil, which also proves women's identification with nature.

### IV. CONCLUSION

Eco-feminism holds that women's identification with nature is mainly demonstrated by women's interconnection with nature. Scarlett as the Spirit of Nature reveals her inborn close link with nature, while Ellen as the Mother Earth plays the role of a holy comforter for people living on Tara. They share their interrelations with the elements in nature. The "feminized" nature and the "naturalized" females in the fiction also prove women's identification with nature.

Meanwhile, Eco-feminism argues that women understand the identification between themselves and nature in physiology and life circulation. This kind of identification is the premise for women and nature to have mutual understanding and soul communication.

Women's identification with nature depicted in *Gone with the Wind* reveals that there is perfect harmony between women and nature. Because of this harmony achieved through integrating with nature, females and nature become increasingly dependent on each other — females serve as the defenders for nature and nature serves as the comforter for females.

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