



**Returning to Tara: An Ecofeministic Perspective of the Film-  
*Gone with the Wind***

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**Abstract**

Nature and culture have been one of the oldest sets of dual entities that have existed since the ancient times in Western thought and literature. These are generally believed to carry gendered values – nature being feminine and culture masculine. The emergence of ecofeminism as a social movement, not only heralded thoughts and discourses that integrated feminism and ecological principles, but also drew parallels between the degradation of the earth and the devaluation of women. It has been argued that naturalizing women and feminizing nature have been employed by patriarchal ideology as means to effect the subordination of women and nature. However there have been several writers whose characters have embodied bold attempts at breaking away from such dominant patriarchal powers. This paper aims at exploring one such character's pursuit of self and her identification with nature. Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* has been one of the most loved, enduring and popular novels of all times that was made into an epic romance film in 1939 by Victor Fleming. Scarlett O'Hara, the protagonist is a character of myriad hues whose turbulent life has been portrayed with brilliant clarity and intensity. The Civil War, the fading glory of the Southern plantations and racial oppression reflect the devastating forces of culture while at the same time portraying the rise and fall of the central figure and her family. This paper argues that *Gone with the Wind* shows clear ecofeministic consciousness by identifying Scarlett's quest for self-identity with her understanding of nature. Through a gradual realization of her bond with land, she breaks away from the binding masculine ideology to pursue her independence, as a woman with a future to look forward to. The paper studies the film *Gone with the Wind*.





Keywords: *Gone with the Wind*, Ecofeminism, Quest, Self

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Ecofeminism on taking up shades of a social movement gave rise to thoughts and discourses that integrated feminism and ecological principles, which sought to draw parallels between the degradation of the earth and the devaluation of women. One of the oldest binary entities that have existed since the ancient times in Western thought and literature, has been that of nature and culture which were also believed to carry gendered values – nature being feminine and culture masculine. Ecofeminism identified an androcentric ideology that confined women and nature within the subjugating and limiting socio-political and economic constructs of a patriarchal and domineering structure. It has often been argued that the identification of maleness with rationality and femaleness with nature has provided the intellectual basis for the domination of women. The public, social and cultural life, together with production and justice, understood to constitute the masculine sphere of reason have often been contrasted with the feminine sphere of emotion, which includes the private, domestic and reproductive life. Thus the relation between the dominated woman and exploited nature was taken as the precept for the development of an ideology that incorporated both ecological and feminine principles.

As a political movement and otherwise, this concept gained ground and significance in the 1970s when Francoise d'Eaubonne officially introduced the term ecofeminism. Ecofeminism identified in women the potential to bring about an ecological revolution thereby ensuring the protection of environment and its preservation for the benefit of humanity. This – it was believed – would bring about new relations between men and women, humankind and nature. Since the beginning of ecofeminism the dichotomy between nature and culture and woman and man and the complex dynamics of relation – of domination, subjugation and suppression – has been forged and established. This paper seeks to identify the relation between a battered earth and an abandoned woman. The protagonist of the film *Gone with the Wind* finds purpose in her life in the land that her ancestors had toiled hard on. Through a gradual realization of her bond with land, she moves away from the binding masculine ideology to pursue her independence, as a woman with a future to look forward to. Thus, the paper argues that one needs to break away from the strict confines of a dichotomist relationship and see the inter-relation between woman and nature.

Scarlett O'Hara is portrayed as a silly and flamboyant girl in the beginning of the movie who seeks attention and wishes to have a good time at balls and parties. Attractive and flirtatious, she does succeed in winning the hearts of many young men although she herself is in





love with Ashley Wilkes. The movie takes us through the various efforts of Scarlett to win over Ashley who, however, marries his cousin Melanie. Civil War and the consequent destruction, downfall and total breakdown of the glorious South, the loss of wealth and position of plantation owners, the change in hegemony and power structures of the south are portrayed with striking clarity and wholeness. At the same time woven into the narrative are threads of complex human relations, love, loss, betrayal, disappointment, loyalty and above all the fight for survival in a world made heartless by the continuous strife and senseless violence it is subjected to. As the film progresses, we find Scarlett transforming into a serious and pragmatic woman who is ready to face the harsh world and is ruthlessly selfish at times for the good of those around her and her home. The Civil War that leaves an unspeakable trail of destruction in its wake and scars people with hopelessness, helplessness and fear affects Scarlett greatly who volunteers to help Dr. Meade in treating the injured. She has a string of unsuccessful marriages and is widowed more than once. The film records the evolution of the character of Scarlett who begins as a silly girl but grows up into an individual with a purpose in life.

While the war can be seen as an attempt to take over the control of lands and trade, and bring about radical changes in the power structures, it can be read from the ecofeministic viewpoint as an attempt by man to bring under his control both culture and nature. The domination and control wielded by men over the women folk can be seen in the way they are able to sway the decisions of women. This is a matter of great concern especially when women allow themselves, or rather are led to denigrate, themselves because of men. Scarlett agrees to her first marriage only because Ashley's marriage to Melanie is confirmed. Here we see a decision taken almost as revenge against what Scarlett believes is betrayal on the part of Ashley who puts on the pretence of being ignorant of her feelings towards him. However later scenes and dialogues give rise to a doubt in the minds of all viewers regarding the virtuousness of Ashley who agrees that Scarlett has a 'passion for living' that he lacks – something that has always appealed to and impressed him. Similarly, the highly idealistic, charming and outrageously frank Rhett Butler is the manifestation of strong will and individualism who demands that Scarlett pay him back for the favours he does. However, the fact that Scarlett answers that she is not going to marry him for the help that he extends towards her is one of the indications of the beginnings of the birth of the self-assured woman she grows into. The strong will and determination of Scarlett is also evident in the scene where while returning to Atlanta, she is abandoned by Rhett on the road and is left to fend for herself, Melanie and her new-born baby. She refuses to be cowed down by the adverse situations and succeeds in taking them safely and reaches Tara. The devastation of her home, the poverty and hunger, as well as the utterly destroyed and wasted plantations and farms leave her overwhelmed; but, the spirit of rebirth and new beginnings, her stoic endurance and refusal to accept defeat has been





immortalized in the soliloquy 'As God is my witness' by Scarlett where she promises herself that neither her, nor her family, would ever be hungry again.

Then begins her efforts at reconstruction and restoration where she toils hard to bring back the glory Tara had once been witness to. The evolution of the character reaches a full circle as she realizes the importance of land. Her work on the plantation when contrasted against her utter disregard of land in the beginning of the film can be read as the triumph of nature. The conversation between Scarlett and her father at the beginning shows the absence of any affinity or sentiments in the mind of Scarlett towards land:

MR. O'HARA. And when I'm gone, I'll leave Tara to you.

SCARLETT. I don't want it. It doesn't mean anything.

However, at the end of the film as Rhett walks out of their marriage and she finds herself without any purpose in life, without anything to live for, the words of her father come back to her and she realizes that Tara is her life. This realization gives her hope and completes her evolution as she becomes whole again when the land becomes a part of her. By identifying the soil as her future, she identifies her own self. By resurrecting the lost glory of her estate she seeks to breathe life into the plantation around. Thus is the dichotomy between nature and woman broken. The strict division of women and nature and the mere reduction of ecofeminism into an ideology arising out of the identification of male dominance as the reason for oppression of women and degradation of nature is questioned and proven faulty. Ecofeminism also presents before one a greater scope of integrating the identity of nature and woman; not merely due to the regenerative and reproductive capacity inherent to both but also because one completes the other. This is why in answer to Scarlett's question to herself "What is there to do? What is there that matters?" she hears the words of her father and Ashley echo: "Land's the only thing that matters. It's the only thing that lasts." It is only then that she becomes completely devoid of the influence of the men in her life. As the last scene rolls with her standing silhouetted against the backdrop of Tara and the fields, the viewers acknowledge the birth of a woman who has broken away from the patriarchal shackles and has taken over the reins of her life and future. As in the words of Ruether,

Women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination. They must unite the demands of the women's movement with those of the ecological movement to envision a radical reshaping of the basic socioeconomic relations and the underlying values of this society. (204)

The traditional values of ecofeminism need to be reconsidered and the logic of equating women with nature on the basis of the victimisation of both by patriarchal powers and an





unreasonable yet accepted dominance and superiority of the male over female needs to be extensively analysed to examine the various facets of the argument. In her quest for self, even the unconscious comprehension of her purpose of life, Scarlett questions the logic of the structures of dominance accepted and exercised during her days. The war fought and the relationship among men and women explicitly present the existent imbalance. Vandana Shiva, Indian physicist and social activist argues in her works that the Western model of development has been violent for many people, especially women and local environments, as the violence that arises from such a model “is rooted in the patriarchal assumptions of homogeneity, domination and centralisation that underlie dominant models of thought and development strategies” (87). It is such essentialism and stereotypes that give rise and credence to the nature/culture dualism. In dominant modes of patriarchal thought, women are linked closer to nature and men are identified as being closer to culture. Nature and women then are both seen as inferior to culture and men. The impact of such dualistic thinking, where hierarchies are set up between dominance and submission, is that “the inferiorised group...must internalise this inferiorisation in its identity and collude in this low valuation, honouring the values of the centre, which form the dominant social values” (Plumwood 127). While it is necessary to break away from such ideologies, it is equally important to analyse the angle of women identity and the possibility of a woman-nature relationship beyond the one forged due to the oppression by man and culture.

The goal of this paper, thus, has been to demonstrate the presence of a strong relation between woman and nature, studied extensively under the purview of ecofeminism which is reflected in Scarlett’s journey towards the discovery of her ‘self’. The exploitation of land, the wielding of power, the control over the life, likes and desires of women present the unfair domination of man. Thus, the film presents keen ecofeministic consciousness and leads one to conclusions that go beyond the mere integration of environment regeneration and female empowerment. In Scarlett’s realisation of the value of land, in her return to Tara, in her determined decision to transform her soil and re-establish its past glory, in her hope that “tomorrow is another day” Scarlett embodies the spirit of womanhood that refuses to bow before adversities – something she derives from Tara, from land.

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