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Theorising Contemporary American Women's Writing*

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on the thinking of feminism and ecocriticism, ecofeminism's main premise is that the patriarchal ideology legitimising the oppression of women and many other marginalised groups is also that which authorises the destructive oppression of nature. Rather than trying to encapsulate all of the expanding theory of ecofeminism, this thesis focuses on a foundational perspective: the ecofeminist deconstruction of dualisms. What ecofeminists share in common is an intention to deconstruct dualisms that serve to obstruct the presentation of a more interconnected, non-hierarchical, and non-reductionist view of life. This is based on a re-conceptualisation of dualisms inherited from patriarchal Western metaphysics, such as culture/nature, male/female, subject/object, transcendence/immanence, God/world, human/animal, public/private, and production/reproduction. The effect of these pervasive dualisms is that their second terms have been historically constructed as if inferior and subordinated to the first terms and have therefore underpinned systemic thinking that ideologically constructs the objects of those second terms as inferior and dependent.

Literary texts might contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of responses to such dualisms and, accordingly, in this thesis an investigation is undertaken of literary works by the contemporary American women writers, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and Marilynne Robinson: writers I define as 'ecofeminist'. The Introduction to the thesis presents an overview of how different generations of feminists and ecofeminists have conceived of nature and have sought to redefine their relationship with it. The subsequent three chapters explore three interlocking sets of dualisms: the transcendence/immanence dualism, the public/private dualism, and the (wo)man/animal dualism. Each chapter traces a dualism's origin and development in Western philosophy before exploring ecofeminists' responses and critiques, not only in theoretical terms, but also via literary performativity in the selected fiction. Derrida's two-step process of deconstruction (first inversion and then re-definition) is a line of thinking and practice that underpins the entire thesis and informs the argument: the feminist and ecofeminist reactions to these dualisms are read as, first, inverting the dualism; and, second, re-defining the terms of the dualism themselves.



Ecofeminism and the Deconstruction of Dualisms: Theorising Contemporary American Women's Writing

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PhD Thesis

Department of English Studies

Durham University

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DEDICATION

To those who taught me to have faith in myself and in the future that lies ahead:

My parents—AbdEl Sabour and Mona.

To the man who had the courage to join me in my journey: My husband Hassan, who has been the best travelling companion.

To the blessing of my life: My kids—AbdEl Rahman, Mohammad, and Mariam.

Abide not with dualism, carefully avoid pursuing it;
As soon as you have right and wrong, confusion ensues, and Mind is lost
Edward Conze, Buddhist Scriptures

INTRODUCTION

Nature: A Contested Issue in Feminism

Ecofeminism is an interdisciplinary theory and practice that evolved mainly from a set of ecological, feminist, and sociological fields of theory and activism. The term ‘ecofeminism’ was first coined by French feminist Françoise d’Eaubonne (1920-2005) in her book *Le Féminisme ou la Mort* in 1974, in which she argues that patriarchy’s oppression of women runs closely parallel to its domination of nature.¹ D’Eaubonne’s argument helped to propel the critical association between women and nature in a number of feminist and ecological texts in the 1970s—although they did not form a coherent body of ecofeminist theory at that time—particularly Rosemary Radford Ruether’s *New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation* (1975), Susan Griffin’s *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (1978), Mary Daly’s *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (1979), and Carolyn Merchant’s *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (1980). Although all of these writers addressed the main ecofeminist premise of the interconnection between women and nature as a means to end all kinds of oppressions, they did not articulate the term ‘ecofeminism’ per se. It was not until the 1980s that ecofeminism developed as an academic discourse as in Ariel Salleh’s ‘Why Ecofeminism?’ and ‘The Growth of Ecofeminism’ (1984), Val Plumwood’s ‘Ecofeminism: An Overview and Discussion of Positions and Arguments’ (1986), and Karen Warren’s ‘Feminism and Ecology’ (1987). According to Linda Vance:

A basic tenet of ecofeminism holds that the patriarchal domination of women runs parallel to the patriarchal domination of nature. Both women and nature have been controlled and manipulated to satisfy masculinist desires, we say; both have been denied autonomous expression and self-determination. (60)

Carolyn Merchant also pinpoints the parallel oppression of women and nature, arguing that ‘[b]oth the women’s movement and the ecology movement are sharply critical of the costs of competition, aggression, and domination arising from the market economy’s *modus operandi* in nature and society’ (*The Death of Nature* xvi, original italics). Mary Daly, similarly, points

¹ It is significant to know that although ‘ecofeminism’ came into existence in the 1970s, the writings of American biologist Rachel Carson (1907-1964) can be regarded as a prelude to ecofeminism. In her seminal work *Silent Spring* (1962), Carson argues that ‘[t]he most alarming of all man’s assaults upon the environment is the contamination of air, earth, rivers, and sea with dangerous and even lethal materials’ (6). Indeed, Carson is the acknowledged foremother of ecofeminism.

out that '[w]omen and our kind—the earth; the sea; the sky—are the real but unacknowledged objects of attack, victimized as the Enemy of patriarchy—of all its wars, of all its professions' (28). Therefore, convinced that no liberation of women could be achieved without liberating nature, according to Plumwood, ecofeminists gave 'positive value to a connection of women with nature which was previously, in the west, given negative cultural value and which was the main ground of women's devaluation and oppression' (*Feminism and The Mastery of Nature* 8).

Indeed, even before the theorisation of ecofeminism, nature has always been a contested issue in feminism. Starting from the early beginnings of first-wave feminism up until now, feminists have been trying to conceptualise their relationship with nature. Niamh Moore points out that "'nature" is a current which runs through all waves' of feminism (227). In her *The Death of Nature*, Carolyn Merchant also states that 'women and nature have an age-old association—an affiliation that has persisted throughout culture, language, and history' (xv). Similarly, Stacy Alaimo believes that '[s]ince nature has been at the heart of a plethora of misogynist arguments and ideologies, grappling with the concept of nature has been an extraordinarily important component of feminist thought' (3). Yet, the relationship between women and nature has taken different forms and conceptualisations in feminist thought. These can be summarised in three stages. Following Ynestra King's argument in her 'The Ecology of Feminism and the Feminism of Ecology', the association between women and nature in feminism runs as follows: First, the 'severing' of the woman-nature connection; second, the 'reinforcement' and re-affirmation of the woman-nature connection; third, the 'reconnection' and re-shaping of the woman-nature connection (22). It is important to note that the concept of 'nature' itself acquired different senses not only in different and subsequent waves of feminism, but it also differed according to individual feminist views within a single feminist wave. In feminist thought, nature has been used in the senses of body, biology, reproduction, domesticity, emotions, and animality—as will be explored in detail below.

Early Feminists and the Negation of the Woman-Nature Connection:

Early feminists in the West were concerned with issues of suffragism and equality. They were concerned with the rights of women in education, work, political representation, and marriage. As all these issues of equality are related to the public sphere, almost all early

feminists, such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Virginia Woolf, challenged the patriarchal discourse which sought to domesticate women by relating them to nature and setting them apart from culture. Elizabeth Grosz in her *Time Travels* argues that:

There has traditionally been a strong resistance on the part of feminists to any recourse to the question of nature. Within feminist scholarship and politics, nature has been regarded primarily as a kind of obstacle against which we need to struggle, as that which remains inert, given, unchanging, resistant to historical, social, and cultural transformations. (13)

Val Plumwood's words, in her *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, echo those of Grosz as she maintains that, in early feminism, '[n]ature, as the excluded and devalued contrast of reason, includes the emotions, the body, the passions, animality, the primitive or uncivilized, the non-human world, matter, physicality and sense experience, as well as the sphere of irrationality, of faith and of madness. In other words, nature includes everything that reason excludes' (19-20). Ariel Salleh also comments on early feminists' repudiation of the woman-nature connection. She points out that '[e]quality feminists from liberal and socialist traditions are wary of discussing women in connection with nature because it is precisely this loaded truism that men have used over the centuries to keep women in their place as "closer to nature"' (13). Thus, there is almost unanimous agreement among recent feminist critics that early feminists repudiated the association between women and nature as they regarded nature as a hindrance to their liberation. A comprehensive overview of this complex history is not feasible here for reasons of space, but even to take a brief overview of the most influential feminist writing since the eighteenth century and the rise of modern political philosophy and economy, reveals the mostly negative construction of nature vis a vis the possibility of women's emancipation in this earlier work. The following five first-and-second-wave feminists, for example, are selected here as representatives of this tendency to negate the woman-nature connection.

Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797): Nature as the Realm of Irrationality:

Indeed, nature was often used as a pejorative term in early feminism. It was synonymous with irrationality, madness, emotions, intuition, primitiveness, animality, and many other negative connotations.² Mary Wollstonecraft equates nature with irrationality and

² A good survey of these negative associations between women and nature and the patriarchal construction of Western dualities can be traced in Susan Griffin's *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*.

domesticity. In her seminal feminist work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Wollstonecraft regards the domesticity and domestication of women as an insult. She contends that '[t]hose who advise us to turn ourselves into gentle domestic animals—how grossly they insult us!' (13). Here, Wollstonecraft effectively uses nature as a synonym for the domestic sphere and the body. She implies that the domestic sphere is opposed to the public sphere, and the body is opposed to mind. Therefore, in her attempt to repudiate the relationship between women and nature, Wollstonecraft aims to transfer women from the private realm of domesticity, body, emotions, and motherly duties of reproduction, to the public realm of work, mind, reason, and equal rights to education. For Wollstonecraft, the domestic duties of women are 'trivial activities' in which women are confined (102). She believes that women's actions must be controlled by reason and rationality rather than emotions and instincts in order to be producers of culture like men. She calls for a cultivation of women's minds by engaging them in public activities. Wollstonecraft acknowledges, 'I do frankly acknowledge the inferiority of women according to the present appearance of things. And I insist that men have increased that inferiority until women are almost sunk below the standard of *rational* creatures' (23-24, my italics). Plumwood comments on this negative implication of nature:

To be defined as "nature" in this context is to be defined as passive, as non-agent and non-subject. [...] It is to be defined as a *terra nullius*, a resource empty of its own purposes or meanings, and hence available to be annexed for the purposes of those supposedly identified with reason or intellect, and to be conceived and moulded in relation to these purposes. (*Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* 4)

Accordingly, with these negative connotations in mind, Wollstonecraft denounced nature as the realm of irrationality, domesticity, body, emotions, and instincts. She was fully convinced that relating women to nature is a constructed patriarchal discourse to subjugate women and keep them out of the realm of culture.

Virginia Woolf (1882-1941): Nature as Domesticity:

After Wollstonecraft's argument regarding the derogatory relation between women and nature, it is Virginia Woolf's writing, with its origins, like Wollstonecraft's in the Godwin circle, in Bloomsbury's political rationalism, that becomes a key shaping force for second-wave feminism. In her politically most influential polemical work, it also serves to consolidate the challenges of the woman-nature connection laid down by her predecessor in

the eighteenth century. Woolf too, at least in this work, considers the identification and relating of women with nature to be a serious obstacle to their emancipation. In her monumental work *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Woolf's main argument is that women must rid themselves of their domesticated status and become engaged in the public sphere in order to be producers of culture. The word 'room' in the title is a multi-layered metaphor as it implies both a physical place and an intellectual space for women. According to Woolf, women served for many years as 'the protected sex' (26) and under the mantle of this protection, they were denied all access to public activities. Woolf calls for a removal of this protection in order to discover women's actual potentials and capacities in the production of culture. She recommends: 'Remove that protection, expose them to the same exertions and activities, make them soldiers and sailors and engine-drivers and dock labourers. [...] Anything may happen when womanhood has ceased to be a protected occupation, I thought, opening the door' (27). Woolf's understanding of the rationale for this domestication of women is highly significant. She believes that inferiorising women by keeping them in the domestic sphere is necessary to patriarchal discourses because women serve as magnifying 'looking glasses' or as an Other to men (25). The more inferior and naturalised women are, the grander and more cultured men will appear to be. She maintains:

Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size. [...] Whatever may be their use in civilised societies, mirrors are essential to all violent and heroic action. That is why Napoleon and Mussolini insist so emphatically upon the inferiority of women, for if they were not inferior, they would cease to enlarge. (25)

Simone de Beauvoir, Sherry Ortner, Shulamith Firestone: Nature as Biology:

Some twenty years after Woolf's continuing rationalist critique of the woman-nature construction, French feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) further advocated the negation of the woman-nature connection as a means to liberating women in the first extended and systematic assault on its hegemonic ideological effects. In her conversations with German feminist Alice Schwarzer (1984), Beauvoir plainly acknowledges her intention to negate the woman-nature association. She postulates, 'Equating ecology with feminism is something that irritates me. They are not automatically one and the same thing at all' (qtd. in Hay 82). Slightly differently from Wollstonecraft and Woolf—who focus on the

concept of nature as domesticity, irrationality, emotions, and instincts—Beauvoir instead set out to challenge nature mostly as ‘the feminine body’, as ‘reproduction’, or, more generally, as ‘women’s biology’. According to Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949), ‘Woman has ovaries, a uterus; these peculiarities imprison her in her subjectivity, circumscribe her within the limits of her own nature’ (15). She believes that it is woman’s biology which prevents her from being an active participant in culture and that man ‘regards the body of woman as a hindrance, a prison, weighed down by everything peculiar to it’ (15). Beauvoir argues that imprisoning woman in her biology is an essential part of patriarchal discourse that subjugates and degrades women. According to her, this patriarchal discourse runs as follows:

Woman is weaker than man, she has less muscular strength, fewer red blood corpuscles, less lung capacity, she runs more slowly, can lift less heavy weights, can compete with man in hardly any sport; she cannot stand up to him in a fight. (61)

All of these stereotypes concerning woman’s biology are appropriated by men to keep women as dependants, as an Other because, for Beauvoir, ‘Otherness is a fundamental category of human thought’ (16). In this point of otherness, Beauvoir echoes Woolf’s above-mentioned idea about women as looking-glasses to men. She believes that ‘[t]he term “female” is derogatory not because it emphasizes woman’s animality, but because it imprisons her in her sex’ (32). Beauvoir celebrates the woman-nature severance in order to emancipate women of this idea of otherness, stating:

Man seeks in woman the Other as Nature and as his fellow being. But we know what ambivalent feelings Nature inspires in man. He exploits her, but she crushes him, he is born of her and dies in her; she is the source of his being and the realm that he subjugates to his will; Nature is a vein of gross material in which the soul is imprisoned, and she is the supreme reality. [...] Woman sums up nature as Mother, Wife, and Idea. (163)

A key focus in Beauvoir’s conceptualisation of the woman-nature connection is the philosophical idea of transcendence and immanence (which will be investigated in detail in Chapter One). According to Beauvoir, men regard themselves as ‘transcendent’ and therefore ‘doom’ women ‘to immanence’ (27). Making men transcendent and women immanent is necessary for perpetuating women’s oppression. In this way, woman is transcended by man. Relating woman to nature is part of this male-dominant idea of dooming her to immanence as Beauvoir comments:

Thus woman is related to *nature*, she incarnates it: the vale of blood, open rose, siren, the curve of a hill, she represents to man the fertile soil, the sap, the material beauty and the soul of the world. [...] She is doomed to *immanence* (256, original italics).

Thus, Beauvoir severs the relationship between woman and nature—as represented in biological determinism—in order to give woman ample room to liberate herself from the confines of her body. To overcome this biological fate, Beauvoir believes that womanhood is not biologically or sexually determined; this, her sex, is rather a constructed ideology imposed upon women by patriarchal society in order to subjugate them. She clarifies this idea of revolting against biological determinism when she states:

One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine. (272)

Building upon Simone de Beauvoir's idea of negating the relationship between nature as biology and woman, in the 1970s, at the dawn of second-wave feminism, the feminist American anthropologist, Sherry Ortner (b. 1941), developed this argument that connecting women with nature degrades them. In her seminal article 'Is Female to Male As Nature is to Culture?' (1972), Ortner explains that 'woman is being identified with, or, if you will, seems to be a symbol of, something that every culture defines as being at a lower order of existence than itself. [...] Now it seems that there is only one thing that would fit that category, and that is "nature" in the most generalized sense' (10). Like Wollstonecraft, Woolf, and Beauvoir, Ortner is of the view that associating woman with nature is a patriarchal ideological construction that is designed to oppress her because, 'since it is always culture's project to subsume and transcend nature, if woman is part of nature, then culture would find it "natural" to subordinate, not to say oppress, her' (12). For Ortner, developing Beauvoir's thesis, nature represents primitiveness while culture represents human consciousness (11). She maintains that women have always been considered closer to nature than men because of their physiology, their social roles, and psychic structure. She points out that '[b]ecause of woman's greater bodily involvement with natural functions surrounding reproduction, she is seen as more a part of nature than men' (15), adding that:

Woman's physiological functions may thus tend in themselves to motivate (in the semantic sense) a view of woman as closer to nature, a view that she herself, as an observer of herself and the world, would tend to accept. Woman creates naturally

from within her own being, while men are free to, or forced to, create artificially, that is, through cultural means, and in such a way as to sustain culture. (16)

Ortner argues that although the view of women as closer to nature is partly a constructed patriarchal ideology to subordinate women and exclude them from culture, women themselves help to perpetuate this ideology by accepting their domestic roles and by being ‘moulded to motherly functions’ (24). However, she significantly claims that it is domesticity which can associate women, not only with nature, but with culture as well. She postulates that because of women’s reproductive roles of child-bearing and child-rearing, women are active participants in the production of culture through their socialisation and acculturation of children. Women transform ‘animals-like infants into cultured beings’ (24). Therefore, according to Ortner, women have been viewed as ‘something intermediate between culture and nature, lower on the scale of transcendence than men’ (16). For her, women are positioned higher than nature and lower than culture. The word “intermediate” has two different meanings for Ortner. First, as she states, it means ““middle status” on a hierarchy of being from culture to nature”; second, “intermediate” may have the significance of “mediating,” i.e., performing some sort of synthesizing or converting function between nature and culture’ (25). Thus, Ortner also wants women to enter and influence the male public sphere of culture by proposing this idea of women’s intermediary position between nature and culture.

Similarly, Canadian-American radical feminist Shulamith Firestone (1945-2012) also dismantles the relationship between women and nature. She follows the same line of thought as Beauvoir and Ortner as she again uses nature as a synonym for reproduction and biology. In her book *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (1972), Firestone argues that ‘reproduction of the species cost women dearly’ (205). She believes that ‘[n]ature produced the fundamental inequality—half the human race must bear and rear the children of all of them— which was later consolidated, institutionalized in the interests of men’ (205). Firestone calls for a radical change in society. She calls for a society in which men share with women the responsibility for child-rearing. The solution, according to her, is ‘*The freeing of women from the tyranny of their reproductive biology by every means available, and the diffusion of childbearing and childrearing role to the society as a whole, men as well as women*’ (206, original italics). Although Firestone’s idea of regarding women’s reproductive biology as the main cause of their oppression is very similar to those of her predecessors, she

differs from them in that she not only tries to engage women in the public sphere, but she also proposes to engage men in the private sphere.

The Second Generation of Feminists and the Re-Affirmation of the Woman-Nature Connection:

As second-wave feminism developed, one aim was to re-affirm or— to use Colleen Mack-Canty’s metaphor—‘reweave’ the relationship between women and nature (154). Accordingly, in her book *Undomesticated Ground*, Stacy Alaimo points out that second-wave feminists transformed ‘nature into a feminist space’ (2). In their attempt to reaffirm their relationship with nature, feminists from different backgrounds gave different shapes and purposes to the woman-nature connection. According to Merchant in her ‘Ecofeminism and Feminist Theory’, ‘Liberal, radical, and socialist feminism have all been concerned with improving the human/nature relationship, and each has contributed to an ecofeminist perspective in different ways’ (100). Depending on their liberal, radical, spiritual, or socialist feminist orientations, second-wave feminists began to identify with nature on different bases:

1- Women and Nature: The Ontological Perspective:

Feminist Susan Griffin believes that the association between women and nature is ontological. At the beginning of her *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (1978), Griffin states:

We are the bird’s eggs. Bird’s eggs, flowers, butterflies, rabbits, cows, sheep; we are caterpillars; we are leaves of ivy and sprigs of wallflower. We are women. We rise from the wave. We are gazelle and doe, elephant and whale, lilies and roses and peach. We are air, we are flame, we are oyster and pearl, we are girls. We are woman and nature. (1, original italics)

Griffin enumerates and challenges all the fallacies introduced by patriarchal society to dominate women and nature. She argues that Western patriarchal societies made use of this ontological relationship between women and nature to oppress women. Griffin elaborates on this point in her article ‘Split Culture’ when she says, ‘[w]e are taught that we live not through the understanding of Nature, but through the manipulation of Nature’ (14). According to Griffin, stepping outside all long-held Western dualities is the best way to liberate both women and nature.

2- Women and Nature: The Transformative Perspective:

Socialist feminists, however, maintain that women and nature must be re-associated on a transformative basis; that is, to transform the relationship between women and nature. In her article 'Survival on Earth: The Meaning of Ecofeminism', transformative feminist Dorothy Dinnerstein points out that:

What feminism most urgently means is something very much broader than the right to equal pay for equal work (such rights are of course essential parts of it). It means *withdrawing from old forms of male-female collaboration, not only because they restrict female access to some major sources of power, status, and pleasure, but now, most centrally, because they express and support the insanity that is killing the world.* (194, original italics)

According to Dinnerstein, women should not denounce their domestic skills as in first-wave feminism; rather, they should implement these skills in order to 'reverse' and 're-order' the world (194). Similarly, men should not decline domestic responsibilities. She suggests that both sexes, equipped with the skills they have already acquired albeit under patriarchy, must take part in both the private and public spheres to change the world. She adds:

Central to such change, wherever women and men live together, is movement toward male sharing of the life-maintaining, nurturant work that women have all long done: intimate, personal work that will be in important ways transformed- as will world-making public work as well- when that public realm's demands are fused with the demands of fragile, growing young life. (197)

3- Women and Nature: The Spiritual Perspective:

Perhaps the largest group of feminists to associate women with nature are those who argue from a spiritual basis. They regard the Earth in spiritual terms as a means to question many long-held Western dualisms such as those of men/women, science/religion, and culture/nature. Spiritual ecofeminist Rosemary Radford Ruether believes that '[a]n ecological-feminist theology of nature must rethink the whole western theological tradition of the hierarchical chain of being and chain of command. This theology must question the hierarchy of human over nonhuman nature as a relationship of ontological and moral value' (145). Similarly, in her article 'First Mother and the Rainbow Children', spiritual ecofeminist Ann Cameron argues:

The feminist movement has long believed and lived “the personal is political, the political is personal,” and now we have learned that the spiritual is an integral part of both personal and political. There can be no separation of spirituality, it is not something you do for an hour on Sunday afternoon. (58)

According to Cameron, spirituality is not a passive luxury. It entails political action to change the world for the better (as will be explored via representations in fiction by Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Marilynne Robinson throughout the thesis).

Following the same line of thought, Riane Eisler calls for ‘reclaiming our partnership traditions’ with nature (33). In these traditions, according to Eisler, ‘there was then no splintering of culture and nature, spirituality, science, and technology. Both our intuition and our reason were applied to the building of civilization, to devising better ways for us to live and work cooperatively’ (34). Eisler maintains that ‘we have been taught that in “Western Tradition,” religion is the spiritual realm and that spirituality is separate from, and superior to, nature. But for our Goddess-worshipping ancestors, spirituality and nature were one’ (30).

Moreover, spiritual ecofeminist Carol Christ states that ‘[w]ith many spiritual feminists, ecofeminists, ecologists, antinuclear activists, and others, share the conviction that the crisis that threatens the destruction of the Earth is not only social, political, economic, and technological, but is at roots spiritual’ (58). According to Christ, ‘we have lost the sense that this Earth is our true home, and we fail to recognize our profound connection with all beings in the web of life’ (58). Therefore, she calls for ‘a profound shift in consciousness: a recovery of more ancient and traditional views that revere the profound connection of all beings in the web of life and a rethinking of the relation of both humanity and divinity of nature’ (58).

In the same vein, American spiritual ecofeminist Starhawk also celebrates this spiritual relationship between women and nature. In her article ‘Power, Authority, and Mystery: Ecofeminism and Earth-Based Spirituality’, she believes that women’s ‘deepest experiences are experiences of connection with the Earth and with the world’ (73). Starhawk challenges the patriarchal idea that the earth is inert, arguing that the Earth is alive. According to Starhawk, considering nature a living being is a way to overcome the nature/culture and religion/science dualities. She contends:

When you understand the universe as a living being, then the split between religion and science disappears because religion no longer becomes a set of dogmas and

beliefs we have to accept even though they don't make sense, and science is no longer restricted to a type of analysis that picks the world apart. (73)

In Starhawk's view, '[e]arth-based spirituality is rooted in three basic concepts', which she calls 'immanence', 'interconnection', and 'community' (73). By 'immanence' she means that nature embodies spirit. 'Interconnectedness' means that everything in the cosmos is interconnected. Starhawk likens the cosmos to the body: every part in the body cannot work without the other (73). As for her concept of 'community', Starhawk, like all spiritual ecofeminists, believes that spirituality's

goal is not individual salvation or enlightenment, or even individual self-improvement, though these may be things and are things that happen along the way. The goal is the creation of a community that becomes a place in which we can be empowered [...] to heal the Earth. (74)

Thus, spirituality, for Starhawk, is not separated from political action. It is a means for empowering the powerless. This political aspect of spirituality is evident in Starhawk's identification of herself as a 'Pagan' and in her definition of 'magic'.³ According to her, '[w]hat Witches and Pagans do is practice magic. I like the definition of magic that says, "Magic is the art of changing consciousness at will." I also think that's a very good definition of political change—changing consciousness on a mass scale in this country' (76).

4- Women and Nature: The Postcolonial Perspective:

In the postmodern era from the 1960s onwards, influenced by their experiences as women of colour, working-class women, or Third-World women, some second-wave feminists—as culturally diverse as Indian scholar, literary theorist, and feminist critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (b.1942), Indian postcolonial and transnational feminist theorist Chandra Talpade Mohanty (b. 1955), American scholar of Chicana cultural theory, feminist theory, and queer theory Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa (1942-2004), and African-American feminist theorists, literary writers and activists Toni Morrison (b. 1931) and Alice Walker (b. 1944)—

³Spiritual ecofeminists' concept of Paganism is crucial to understanding their thought. Paganism, for them, is a polytheistic perspective that allows multiple ways to the divine. Paganism is not only a way to get rid of the patriarchal dominating religions, it is also related to the Earth itself as is evident from the term's etymology. In her article 'The Juice and the Mystery', spiritual ecofeminist Margot Adler maintains that '[p]agan simply means a member of a polytheistic religion, such as the ancient Greek or Egyptian religions, or a member of one of the indigenous folk or tribal religions found all over the world' (152). Adler adds that "'pagan" has come to mean "nonreligious" and more or less free-spirited. The word's roots are far different. "Pagan" comes from the Latin *Paganus*, which means a country-dweller. *Paganus* is derived from *Pagus*, Latin for rural district' (152, original italics)

began to articulate challenges to feminism as a monolithic homogenous discourse. Influenced by postmodern critics such as Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault, these feminists, and others in the third wave, were increasingly skeptical about feminism as a 'meta-narrative'. The idea of a shared sisterhood, on which many feminisms were based, began to be undermined by the recognition of the many diverse and different experiences of these women. In their view, whereas feminism had begun as a social and political movement that aimed at eradicating the oppression of women, the homogenisation involved in claims of commonality along gender lines, ironically, highlighted other equally destructive kinds of oppression, those based on race, class, and cultural background: feminists recognised that their different identities had become occluded by assumptions around identity associated with white, middle-class, Western women. In speaking for all women, in effect, prominent and socially privileged women had silenced or marginalised other women. In her 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses', Chandra Mohanty, for example, argues that in 'western feminist discourse political practice is neither singular nor homogenous in its goals, interests or analyses' (61)

Aligned initially with postcolonial feminism, postcolonial ecofeminists have proceeded to pose that no liberation of working-class women, women of colour, or Third-World women could be achieved without a concomitant liberation of the concept of nature. Indian ecofeminist Vandana Shiva, for example, argues that both women and nature are oppressed for colonial, rather than simply patriarchal, interests. In her article 'Development, Ecology, and Women', Shiva maintains that colonialism 'destroyed women's productivity both by removing land, water, and forests from their management and control, as well as through the ecological destruction of these resources' (82). She relates women, nature, and indigenous people to each other as the main victims of colonialism, maintaining that:

Dominant modes of perception based on reductionism, duality, and linearity are unable to cope with equality and diversity. [...] The reductionist mind superimposes the roles and forms of power of western male-oriented concepts on women, all non-western peoples, and even on nature, rendering all three "deficient," and in need of "development". (83)

Similarly, ecocritic Kimberly N. Ruffin, in her *Black on Earth: African American Ecoliterary Traditions*, explores the interlocked relationship between the oppression of African American people and nature. As she states in her Introduction, her book tries to pinpoint 'the dynamic influence of the natural and social order on African American experience and outlook' (2).

Significantly for my thesis, in her *Shifting the Ground: American Women Writers' Revisions of Nature, Gender, and Race*, ecofeminist Rachel Stein also insists that 'American conceptions of nature have always been deeply social, mirroring and reflecting hierarchic social relations, particularly those of gender and race, to the point where we cannot truly redress these social roles without reconceiving our notions of nature as well' (4).

These perspectives on the interconnection between women and nature reveal the key frameworks through which the relationship between women and nature began to be explored, giving rise to ecofeminist perspectives. Each in different ways also began to deconstruct various sets of dualisms in order to expose and end the oppression of both women and nature.

Ecofeminism and the Deconstruction of Dualisms:

Ironically, although first- and second-wave feminists tried to overcome the culture/nature dualism, with all the other sets of dualisms that it entails, they also, mostly inadvertently, helped to perpetuate these very dualisms. It is true they challenged them and were sceptical of them, but they failed sufficiently to *deconstruct* them. Many of these feminists are thus seen to have widened the scope of domination by aligning themselves with an expanded but untransformed form of the master narratives of Western culture. Plumwood comments on this widened domination in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*:

But even if the absorption of women into the master model of human culture were to be widely successful, ecological feminists would argue, it would be objectionable, because it amounts to having women join elite men in belonging to a privileged class, in turn defined by excluding the inferior class of the non-human and those counted as less human. [...] That is to say, it is a strategy of making some women equal in a now *wider* dominating class, without questioning the structure of or the necessity for domination. (29, original italics)

Indeed, in their attempt to liberate women from the domestic and motherly roles assigned to them by society, first-wave feminists might be seen to perpetuate and inadvertently endorse the patriarchal oppression of women. By adopting the stance of negating the woman-nature connection, they kept the man/woman, mind/body, rationality/instincts, and more inclusively, culture/nature dualisms as they are without trying to deconstruct them. What they achieved was to transfer women from the sphere of nature with all its connotations into the sphere of culture with all its connotations. Ironically, as Alaimo comments, 'nature is kept at bay—

repelled— rather than redefined’ (3). Plumwood critiques this stance of merely repudiating the woman-nature connection. She believes that ‘to simply repudiate the old tradition of feminine connection with nature and to put nothing in its place, usually amounts to the implicit endorsing of an alternative master model of the human, and of human relations to nature, and to female absorption into this model’ (23). Even second-wave feminists who reaffirmed the woman-nature connection also left the dualism itself untouched. It was modern ecofeminists who set out to not only deconstruct the dualism, but also redefine the terms of the dualisms themselves.

This brings us to the core of this thesis. Rather than trying to encapsulate the expanding field of ecofeminism here, the thesis will focus on one main premise of ecofeminism; that is, the call for a more radical deconstruction of dualisms. To date, deconstructing dualisms in ecofeminist theory is mostly imprecisely explored or underexplored practice. Two important things need to be clarified here: first, this thesis uses the word ‘dualism’ consistently throughout as different from the word ‘dichotomy’; second, ‘deconstruction’ here is not only used literally to mean to dismantle the dualism but is also a reference to the post-structuralist theory of deconstruction that ecofeminists have drawn on to put an end to all dualisms, and hence, all oppressions. Let us explore first the meaning of dualism. What all ecofeminists share in common is their critique of almost all sorts of dualisms in order to try to present an interconnected, non-hierarchical, and non-reductionist view of life. This critique of dualism is based on an inevitable re-conceptualisation of the hierarchical dualisms inherited from Western metaphysics, such as reason/emotion, reason/body, reason/matter, culture/nature, male/female, subject/object, transcendence/immanence, God/world, human/animal, public/private, production/reproduction, and master/slave. These sets of dualisms are frequently governed by gender categories in which the second terms are culturally and historically thought to be inferior and subordinated to the first terms of the dualisms. Rosemary Radford Ruether argues that ‘the dominant white western male rationality has been based on linear, dichotomized thought patterns that divide reality into dualism: one is good and the other bad, one superior and the other inferior, one should dominate and the other should be eliminated or surpassed’ (148). Similarly, Ynestra King in her ‘Healing the Wounds: Feminism, Ecology and the Nature/Culture Dualism’ contends that ‘the systematic denigration of working-class people and people of color, women, and animals is connected to the basic

dualism that lies at the root of Western civilization’ (106). Thus, as Diamond and Orenstein maintain:

Feminists who had been exploring alternatives to the traditional “woman is to nature as man is to culture” formulation, who were seeking a more fundamental shift in consciousness than the acceptance of women’s participation in the marketplace of the public world, began to question the nature versus culture dichotomy itself. These activists, theorists, and artists sought to consciously create new cultures that would embrace and honor the values of caretaking and nurturing—cultures that would not perpetuate the dichotomy by raising nature over culture or by raising women over men. Rather, they affirmed and celebrated the embeddedness of all the Earth’s peoples in the multiple webs and cycles of life. (x-xi)

As will be examined further throughout the thesis, dualism is an entrenched cognitive schema in Western thought, persisting from the writings of Aristotle onwards. In his *Politics* (350 BC), Aristotle insists that all living creatures are governed by a relationship of duality. He claims:

For in all things which form a composite whole and which are made up of parts, whether continuous or discrete, a distinction between the ruling and subject element comes to light. Such a *duality* exists in living creatures, but not in them only; it originates in the constitution of the universe; even in things which have no life there is a ruling principle [...]. We will therefore restrict ourselves to the living creature, which, in the first place, consists of soul and body: and of these two, the one is *by nature* the ruler, and the other the subject’ (Book 1, Chapter 5, my italics).

This thesis uses the word ‘dualism’ in the same sense as explicated by Plumwood in her *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. In this thorough account of dualism and its politics, Plumwood argues that:

The concept of dualism is central to an understanding of what is problematic in the attempt to reverse the value both of the feminine and of nature [...]. Dualism is the *process* by which contrasting concepts (for example, masculine and feminine gender identities) are formed by domination and subordination and construed as oppositional and exclusive. (31, my italics)

Indeed, dualism does not merely mean ‘the division of something conceptually into two opposed or contrasted aspects, or the state of being so divided’ as defined in the Oxford English Dictionary. Dualism, as Plumwood rightly argues, is a process which entails not only division but also hierarchical construction and relations of power. Unlike dichotomy which it supersedes, dualism involves hierarchical and reductionist distinctions. Every dualism is a

dichotomy, but not every dichotomy is a dualism. ‘A dualism,’ Plumwood contends, ‘is more than a relation of dichotomy, difference, or non-identity, and more than a simple hierarchical relationship. In dualistic construction, as in hierarchy, the qualities (actual or supposed), the culture, the values and the areas of life associated with the dualised other are systematically and pervasively constructed and depicted as inferior’ (47). I agree with Plumwood that ‘[w]hat is at issue here is not the distinctions between women/men, and human/nature, but their *dualistic construction*’ and that ‘we cannot resolve the problem by a simple strategy of reversal’ (33, 32, my italics). Alison Jaggar consolidates this view of dualism. Like Plumwood, she also prefers the term ‘dualism’ to any other term in order to indicate the hierarchical structure of Western metaphysics. Specifically, she uses the term ‘normative dualism’. According to Jaggar, ‘normative dualism is the belief that what is especially valuable about human beings is a particular “mental” capacity, the capacity for rationality’ (28). Jaggar believes that Western metaphysics generates a ‘normative dualism’ which places excessive value on the mind at the expense of the body. She maintains that ‘[p]atriarchy opposes mind to matter, self to other, reason to emotion and enquirer to object of enquiry. It posits dualisms within which one side of the dualism is superior to the other side and in this way imposes a hierarchy on nature’ (96).

Another significant feature of dualism is that the various sets of dualisms cannot be separated from each other; they are interconnected, mutually reinforcing, and entangled, leading to each other to the degree that one cannot accurately decide which dualism starts first and which gives rise to the other. This entanglement of dualisms is related to the entanglement and interconnectedness of forms of oppression. According to Plumwood, ‘[f]orms of oppression from both the present and the past have left their traces in western culture as a network of dualisms, and the logical structure of dualism forms a major basis for the connection between forms of oppression’ (2). Although it is difficult to separate the sets of dualisms from each other and to accurately decide which leads to the other, it is my contention that the culture/nature dualism can helpfully be seen to be foundational because it is all-encompassing and embraces all the other sets of dualisms. The interconnectedness of dualisms causes them to be what Plumwood refers to as ‘linking postulates’. In Plumwood’s account, ‘linking postulates are assumptions normally made or implicit in the cultural background which create equivalences or mapping between the pairs. For example, [...] the postulate that the sphere of reason is masculine maps the reason/body pair on to the male/female pair’ (45). They form a network where every pair leads to the other. Thus, according to this postulation of dualism, early feminists did not change the system and

construction of dualism, but they challenged a dichotomy or key opposition by trying to erase the differences between the sexes. To change the system of the construction of the dualism itself, ecofeminists employ the theory of deconstruction as will be explored in the following section.

Feminism and Deconstruction:

Deconstruction might be misconstrued to suggest destruction and arguably it is this misconstrual that has led some feminists to be sceptical towards any alliance between feminism and postmodernism, in general, and deconstruction, in particular. Their main objection has been that deconstruction deconstructs the female subject. According to Grosz,

[t]he general suspicion that many feminists have of that work now most easily categorized as postmodern, the wariness of projects to “decenter subjectivities,” sexualities, agencies, political platforms, and revolutionary goals, has caused many feminists to cling steadfastly to humanist and enlightenment values or to naturalist and essentialist commitments that may ultimately harm more readily than help various feminist projects. (‘Ontology and Equivocation’ 115-16)

On the other hand, many feminists welcome the alliance between feminism and deconstruction as a way of dismantling the dualism of Western metaphysics. In her article ‘Dancing with Derrida: Anti-Essentialism and the Politics of Female Subjectivity’, Gill Jagger points out that:

Deconstruction provides a powerful critique of patriarchal metaphysics and the dualisms on which it is based. In particular, it reveals the masculine/feminine opposition to be at the root of both conceptuality and women’s exclusion from the realm of conceptuality, at least in any other than phallic terms. Thus both Derrida and feminists note the connections between logocentrism and phallogentrism. (191)

Jagger contends that ‘the strategies and insights of Derridean deconstruction can be adapted for feminist purposes’ (192). Along the same line, Diane Elam believes that deconstruction can be useful for feminist discourse. In her book *Feminism and Deconstruction*, Elam argues:

Deconstruction is better understood as a questioning of the terms in which we understand the political, rather than a simple negation of the political. In this sense, it has much in common with the feminist refusal to accept the terms within and by which politics is conventionally practiced. (67)

In this quotation, Elam replies to some feminist charges against deconstruction that it is ahistorical and apolitical. According to Elam, deconstruction does not suggest the negation of the political; on the contrary, its questioning of long-held concepts and binaries is political in itself. Grosz is also in accord with Elam about the political nature of deconstruction and, therefore, its relevance for feminism. She believes that:

[D]econstruction provides a way of rethinking our common conceptions of politics and struggle, power and resistance by insisting that no system, method, or discourse can be as all-encompassing, singular, and monolithic as it represents itself. Each is inherently open to its own undoing, its own deconstruction (deconstruction is not imposed from outside a discourse or tradition but emerges from that discourse's own inner dynamics). ('Derrida's Politics of Sexual Difference' 61)

In addition, Jonathan Dollimore is aware of the role that deconstruction can play in challenging the patriarchal discourse. He states:

It is an achievement of deconstruction to show the limitations of binary logic in theory and its often pernicious effects in practice; to show how binaries, far from being eternal necessities of cultural organization, or essential, unavoidable attributes of human thought, are unstable constructs whose antithetical terms presuppose, and can therefore be used against, each other. (64)

In a similar vein, Gayatri Spivak is of the view that deconstruction can be illuminating as a critique of phallogentrism as it questions the issue of sexual difference and, thus, challenges the woman/man dichotomy. In her article 'Displacement and the Discourse of Woman', Spivak maintains:

My attitude towards deconstruction can now be summarized: first, deconstruction is illuminating as a critique of phallogentrism; second, it is convincing as an argument against the founding of a hystero-centric to counter a phallogentric discourse; third, as a "feminist" practice itself, it is caught on the other side of sexual difference. (184)

Patricia Waugh's standpoint is also relevant here as she celebrates the alliance between feminism, postmodernism and deconstruction. In her book *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern*, Waugh sets out:

My contention in this book is that feminism and postmodernism clearly *do* share many concerns as they each develop from the 1960s onwards. Both are concerned to disrupt traditional boundaries: between 'art' and 'life', masculine and feminine, high

and popular culture, the dominant and the marginal. Both examine the cultural consequences of the decline of a consensus aesthetics, of an effective 'literary' voice, or the absence of a strong sense of stable subjectivity. (6, original italics)

According to Waugh, deconstructing the stable subject is not a defect in deconstruction as some feminists may argue. On the other hand, it is the absence of a fixed subject that helps feminists to disrupt the traditional dichotomies and give new meanings to some concepts that have been used against women in patriarchal discourse. Similarly, Judith Butler, in her article 'Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of "Postmodernism"', explains:

To deconstruct the subject of feminism is not, then, to censure its usage, but, on the contrary, to release the term into a future of multiple significations, to emancipate it from the maternal or racialist ontologies to which it has been restricted, and to give it play as a site where unanticipated meanings might come to bear. (16)

According to Butler, '[t]o deconstruct the concept of matter or that of bodies is not to negate or refuse either term. To deconstruct these terms means, rather, to continue to use them, to repeat them, to repeat them subversively, and to displace them from the contexts in which they have been deployed as instruments of oppressive power' (17). Indeed, to deconstruct the subject of woman means to emancipate it from a fixed discourse because woman does not any longer have a fixed referent, but, under the umbrella of deconstruction, it acquires an endless chain of referents and signifieds:

If its referent is not fixed, then possibilities for new configurations of the term become possible. In a sense, what women signify has been taken for granted for too long, and what has been fixed as the "referent" of the term has been "fixed," normalized, immobilized, paralyzed in positions of subordination. (Butler 16)

Derrida's Two-Phase Process of Deconstruction:

French post-structuralist critic Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) is regarded as the father of deconstruction. He coined the term in the 1960s and helped redefine many of the traditional metaphysical concepts in philosophy that have come to underpin common sense or hegemonic thinking. According to Derrida, deconstruction is a two-phase process: in the first phase, binaries are inverted; in the second phase, they are displaced and given different meanings. According to Derrida, deconstructing the subject is not an end in itself; rather it is the first phase in the process of deconstruction. Once the subject is deconstructed and dichotomies are inverted, new meanings and values are given to each aspect of the dualism.

This is Derrida's way to challenge metaphysics. When he applies deconstruction to the word "woman", Derrida states:

There is one meaning to the word "woman" which is caught in the opposition in the couple, and to this extent you can use the force of the woman to reverse, to undermine, this first stage of opposition. Once you have succeeded. The word "woman" does not have the same meaning. Perhaps we could not even speak of "woman" anymore. Of course, these two stages are not chronologically altered. Sometimes you can make the two gestures at the same time, and sometimes you cannot go from one to the other. ('Women in the Beehive' 147).

Elaborating on Derrida's two-phase process of deconstruction, Christie V. McDonald says in 'Choreographies', an interview with Derrida:

In the first phase a reversal would take place in which the opposed terms would be inverted. Thus woman, as a previously subordinate term, might become the dominant one in relation to man. Yet because such a scheme of reversal could only repeat the traditional scheme (in which the hierarchy of duality is always reconstituted) it alone could not effect any significant change. Change would only occur through the 'second' and more phase of deconstruction in which a 'new' concept would be forged simultaneously. (71)

It is significant that the relationship between the two phases of deconstruction is structural rather than necessarily chronological. Commenting on the relationship between the two phases of deconstruction, Derrida states:

I am not sure that "phase two" marks a split with "phase one," a split whose form would be a cut along an invisible line. The relationship between these two phases doubtless has another structure. I spoke of two distinct phases for the sake of clarity, but the relationship of one phase to another is marked less by conceptual determinations (that is, where a new concept follows an archaic one) than by a transformation or general deformation of logic. ('Choreographies' 72)

Indeed, it is this structural rather than chronological nature of deconstruction that makes it relevant to dismantling dualisms in ecofeminism.

Deconstructing the Concept of Nature in Feminism:

It is significant that the feminist and ecofeminist relations to nature can be read in terms of the two phases of Derrida's deconstruction. The first generations of feminists attempted to invert the man/woman and culture/nature dualisms by seeking to repudiate the identification with nature and identifying instead with the realm of culture. This is typified in the views of Virginia Woolf, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Simone de Beauvoir as explained above. Then, the next generations of feminists, specifically third-wave feminists, began to engage in the second phase of deconstruction by looking for new conceptions for the terms of the dualisms. This is exemplified in the views of some contemporary feminist theorists such as Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway, and Bruno Latour, and also in the fictional writings of Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Marilynne Robinson, as will be investigated. But, as Derrida argues that the two phases of deconstruction are complementary to each other and cannot be separated, the attitudes of these different generations of feminists towards the dualisms cannot also be separated. The first stage of inversion is as important as the second stage of displacement.

Inversion as a Key Stage in Dismantling Dualisms:

The intellectual decision to regard the stances of the earlier generations of feminists towards nature as a flaw in their thinking might have been the case had there not arisen subsequent generations of feminists who built on and refined this early stage of feminist thinking. In other words, as feminism as a body of thought is a cycle of interwoven generations who complement and build on each other's ideas, it may be unfair to judge each generation in itself; rather each generation should be judged in relation to the possibilities it opens up for other generations. According to this, the effort of early generations of feminists to repudiate nature and to invert the culture/nature dualism and all its 'linking postulates' is not a shortcoming or flaw in itself; it should rather be read as an essential phase in the two-phase process of deconstructing nature. This first phase of reversing dichotomies opened up the way for other generations of feminists to adopt a different stance towards the woman-nature connection.

Moreover, this attitude of the first generations of feminists can be read as a way of escaping the reductive term of essentialism and patriarchy's essentialising of women. In order not to be described as essentialists, the above-mentioned feminists tried to repudiate their relationship with all that is natural. They were not aware that to be essentialist at this early stage and to preserve the metaphysical dualism might be a necessary strategy, not a pitfall at

all. In his ‘Choreographies’, an interview with Christie V. McDonald, Derrida comments on the political significance of maintaining the two terms of the dichotomy at the first stage of deconstruction. He points out that the trap of ‘essentializing fetishes’

is more political and can only be avoided by taking account of the *real* conditions in which women’s struggles develop on all fronts (economic, ideological, political). These conditions often require the preservation (within longer or shorter phases) of metaphysical presuppositions that one must (and knows already that one must) question in a later phase—or an other place—because they belong to the dominant system that one is deconstructing on a *practical* level. (70, original italics)

According to Derrida, preserving the two items of the dualism in the early stages of political struggle cannot be avoided. With regard to feminism, preserving the man/woman and culture/nature dualism, even if inverted, in the works of early feminists was an essential step that might be understood as political. Waugh believes that it was important in this early stage of feminism to be essentialist in some way or another in order to secure feminism stable grounds on which to stand and from which to ask questions. According to Waugh,

[i]t is a stage in the recognition of oppression: if one has always been defined as an ‘object’ in someone else’s gaze or discourse, then full identity will be conceived in the terms of adopting their subject position for oneself, asking the question “What am I?” Such a question posits oneself as both a sovereign subject and one’s own object, but it does allow women to experience the subject position (whatever its illusoriness) which the sexual differential man/subject: woman/other has never allowed them in relation to men. (24)

Waugh maintains that essentialising the subject ‘woman’ in the early generations of feminism was important for positioning women in the political arena. Experiencing the subject position of woman, even if it were essentialised, allowed feminists to foreground their identity as women in society. Waugh adds that ‘once women have experienced themselves as “subjects”, then they can begin to problematise and to deconstruct the socially constructed subject positions available to them, and to recognize that an inversion of the valuation of “maleness” and “femaleness” will not in itself undermine the social construction of “masculinity” and “femininity”’ (25).

Jonathan Dollimore also shares this stance with Waugh. He praises this early stage of inverting dualisms. According to Dollimore, ‘of course, inversion is only a stage in a process of resistance whose effects can never be guaranteed and perhaps not even predicted’ (66).

Although the inversion or reversal of a binary does not actually challenge the dichotomy and sometimes perpetuates it, it remains a crucial step in the process of displacing the binary. Dollimore argues that:

In actual historical instances, the inversion is not just the necessary precondition for the binary's subsequent displacement, but often already constitutes a displacement, if not directly of the binary itself, then certainly of the moral and political norms which cluster dependently around its dominant pole and in part constitute it. (66)

In addition, French feminist Julia Kristeva in her 'Women's Time' is also conscious of the role that early generations of feminists played in dismantling dualisms through first repudiating all that is 'nature'. She points out that:

The political demands of women; the struggles for equal pay for equal work, for taking power in social institutions on an equal footing with men; the rejection, when necessary, of the attributes traditionally considered feminine or maternal insofar as they are deemed incompatible with insertion in that history—all are part of the *logic of identification* with certain values. (18-19, original italics)

By 'logic of identification' Kristeva refers to the inclination of early feminist thinking in the writings of Wollstonecraft, and Beauvoir and others to be 'masculinised' and to negate all that relates them to the feminine. According to Kristeva, this attitude was essential for achieving the political demands of women at that time. Kristeva pinpoints the benefits that feminists gained when they adopted this masculinising stance:

Here it is unnecessary to enumerate the benefits which this logic of identification and the ensuing struggle have achieved and continue to achieve for women (abortion, contraception, equal pay, professional recognition, etc.); these have already had or will soon have effects even more important than those of the Industrial Revolution. Universalist in its approach, this current in feminism *globalizes* the problems of women of different milieux, ages, civilizations, or simply of varying psychic structures, under the label "Universal Woman." A consideration of *generations* of women can only be conceived in this global way as a succession, as a progression in the accomplishment of the initial program mapped out by its founders. (19, original italics)

Indeed, this early feminist tendency to 'globalise' the problems of women proved to be strategic at that time, although more recent feminisms promoting intersectionality might consider it oppressive to homogenise women in one category and to disregard their

differences and specific experiences. This question will come to the fore later in looking at differences in approach and purpose between the women writers under consideration. It is significant, however, that Kristeva here anticipates Spivak's concept of strategic essentialism.

Spivak's Strategic Essentialism:

All of the above attitudes towards the political significance that early generations of feminists gained by being 'essentialist' brings us to a significant term put into very wide circulation by the Indian scholar and feminist critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, that is to say, the concept of 'strategic essentialism'. Although Spivak is indebted to Derrida for coining the term, it is she who helped crystallise and develop it. In her interview with Elizabeth Grosz, conducted in Sydney in 1984 and published under the title 'Criticism, Feminism, and the Institution', Spivak speaks for the first time about her concept of strategic essentialism and the influence of Derrida on her thinking. She says, '[w]hen I first read Derrida I didn't know who he was, I was very interested to see that he was actually dismantling the philosophical tradition from *inside* rather than from *outside*' (7, original italics). Spivak clearly acknowledges her debt to Derrida, stating:

One of Derrida's most scandalous contributions is to begin with what is very familiar in many radical positions and to take it with the utmost seriousness, with literal seriousness, so that it questions the position (de)constructively as the wholly intimate other. One is left with the useful yet semimournful position of *the unavoidable usefulness of something that is dangerous*. ('In a Word' 5, my italics).

It is the very last line of this quotation that explains what strategic essentialism is for both Derrida and Spivak. Both Derrida and Spivak regard essentialism as a dangerous concept and a trap for those who use it. Yet, it is 'unavoidable' because it proves to be 'useful' in some 'strategic' moments. In his 'Interview with Jean-Louis Houdebine and Guy Scarpetta', Derrida states that he has 'never believed that there were *metaphysical* concepts *in and of themselves*. No concept is by itself, and consequently in and of itself, metaphysical, outside all the textual work in which it is inscribed' (57, original italics). However, in the same interview, Derrida maintains that sometimes there is a "strategic" necessity that requires the occasional maintenance of an *old name* in order to launch a new concept' (71, original italics). In his 'Women in the Beehive', Derrida speaks specifically about the maintenance of the word "woman" as a strategic necessity in feminism. He argues that

preserving the word “woman” in the first phase of deconstruction is strategically necessary for dismantling the woman/man binarism. Derrida states:

But as soon as you have reached the stage of deconstruction, then the opposition between women and men stops being pertinent. Then you cannot say that woman is another name, or a good trope, for writing, undecidability, and so on. *We need to find some way to progress strategically.* Starting with deconstruction of phallogocentrism and using the feminine force, so to speak, in this move and then—and this would be the second stage, or second level—to give up the opposition between men and women. At this second stage, “woman” is clearly not the best trope to refer to all those things: undecidability and so on. (146-147, my italics).

As a deconstructionist postcolonial feminist, as she likes to label herself, Spivak extensively engages with Derrida’s thinking. But she develops his concept of strategic essentialism to suit her own specifically postcolonial feminist standpoint. In her interview with Ellen Rooney, Spivak elaborates on her particular conceptualisation of strategic essentialism. She contends: ‘The strategic use of an essence as a mobilizing slogan or masterword like *woman* or *worker* or the name of a nation is, ideally, self-conscious for all mobilized’ (3, original italics). Spivak argues that ‘If one is considering strategy, one has to look at where the group—the person, the persons, or the movement—is situated when one makes claims for or against essentialism. *A strategy suits a situation; a strategy is not a theory*’ (‘In a Word’ 3-4, my italics). Significantly, Spivak differentiates between ‘strategy’ and ‘theory’. For Spivak, a theory is suitable for all situations, but a strategy can be applied only in certain situations. She insists that essentialism is a strategy; it is not suitable for all situations and if adopted as a universal theory will be dangerous. Therefore, Spivak is worried about the fact ‘that strategies are taught as if they were theories, good for all cases. One has to be careful to see that they do not misfire for people who do not resemble us and do not share the situation of prominent U. S. universities and colleges’ (‘In a Word’ 4).

In addition to her differentiation between ‘strategy’ and ‘theory’ in the use of essentialism, Spivak differentiates between essentialism and universalism. She points out:

So, I am fundamentally concerned with that heterogeneity, but I chose a universal discourse in that moment because universalization, finalisation, is an irreducible moment in any discourse—rather than define myself as specific rather than universal, I should see what in the universalizing discourse could be useful and then go on to see where that discourse meets its limits and its challenge within that field. *I think we*

have to choose again strategically, not universal discourse but essentialist discourse. I think that since as a deconstructivist—see, I just took a label upon myself—I cannot in fact clean my hands and say, “I’m specific.” *In fact I must say I am an essentialist from time to time.* (‘Criticism, Feminism, and the Institution’ 11, my italics).

In order to understand what, exactly, Spivak aims at in the above quotation when she says that she is ‘essentialist’, one needs to consider Elizabeth Grosz’s differentiation between four important and overlapping terms that are used in patriarchal discourse to justify women’s subordination: ‘essentialism’, ‘biologism’, ‘naturalism’, and ‘universalism’.⁴ According to Grosz, ‘[t]hese four terms are frequently elided. Each has commonly served as a shorthand formula for the others’ (‘Sexual Difference and the Problem of Essentialism’ 49). Grosz believes that essentialism entails both biologism and naturalism, but, in her view, universalism

refers to the attributions of invariant social categories, functions, and activities to which all women in all cultures are assigned. These may be the result of biology or ontology, but just as frequently they may reflect universal social or cultural requirements, such as the sexual division of labor or the prohibition of incest. Unlike essentialism, biologism, or naturalism in which not only the similarities but also the differences between women may be accounted for (race and class characteristics can also be explained in naturalist, biologist, or essentialist terms), universalism tends to suggest only the commonness of all women at all times and in all social contexts. By definition, it can only assert similarities, what is shared in common by all women, and what homogenizes women into a category. (48-49)

Thus, as a strategic essentialist, Spivak sometimes unites women on the bases of their biology and/or social categorisation for political purposes, but she does not ignore race and class differences between them. She refutes that she is a universalist because a universalist homogenises women in one category regardless of their differences and specificities.

⁴ According to Grosz, ‘[e]ssentialism entails the belief that those characteristics defined as women’s essence are shared in common by all women at all times. It implies a limit on the variations and possibilities of change—it is not possible for a subject to act in a manner contrary to her essence’ (47). ‘Biologism,’ for Grosz, ‘is a particular form of essentialism in which women's essence is defined in terms of biological capacities’ (48). As for naturalism, Grosz defines it as ‘a form of essentialism in which a fixed nature is postulated for women. Once again, this nature is usually given biological form, but this is by no means invariant. Naturalism may be asserted on theological or ontological rather than biological grounds’ (48). The fourth and last term is ‘universalism’. Grosz states that ‘while also closely related to essentialism, biologism, and naturalism, universalism need not be based on innate or fixed characteristics’ (48).

Third-Wave Feminists and the Re-Shaping of the Woman-Nature Connection:

According to Colleen Mack-Canty, '[t]oday many feminists believe we are in a third wave of feminism, one that challenges the idea of dualism itself while recognizing diversity, particularity, and embodiment' (154). She adds: 'Third wave is seen as an evolution, albeit a less than even one, in feminist thought generally, not a break from the past' (159). Indeed, third-wave feminism is not a break from first-and-second-wave feminisms. It can be regarded as a continuation of the project of women's liberation that earlier feminists began. As Plumwood points out, third-wave feminism 'is not a *tsunami*, a freak tidal wave which has appeared out of nowhere sweeping all before it. Rather, it is prefigured in and builds on work not only in ecofeminism but in radical feminism, cultural feminism and socialist feminism over the last decade and a half' (*Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* 39, original italics).

Whereas second-wave feminism specifically challenged the culture/nature dualism, what is at issue here in third-wave feminism is not the culture/nature dualism and all the other pairs of dualisms that it entails, but the concept of duality itself. According to Ariel Salleh in her book *Ecofeminism as Politics: Nature, Marx and the Postmodern*, 'There is no need to accept the dualism of either History versus Nature, or of Man versus Woman. In fact, sexualities form a continuum rather than a polarity' (37). In their attempt to conceptualise the relationship between women and nature, third-wave feminists realised that the culture/nature duality must be reconsidered and the term 'nature' itself must be re-defined.

Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti: 'Natureculture' Not Nature/Culture:

American feminist, scientist, and philosopher Donna Haraway is one of the pioneers who have called for such a fundamental reconsideration of dualisms. In the Introduction to *The Haraway Reader*, she argues that all of her 'writing is committed to swerving and tripping over these bipartite, dualist traps rather than trying to reverse them or resolve them into supposedly larger wholes' (2). In her insistence on the need to remove the boundaries between nature and culture, she significantly uses the term 'natureculture' as one word that does not separate nature from culture (*The Haraway Reader* 2). Haraway insists that 'science and feminism, anti-racism and science studies, biology and cultural theory, fiction and fact closely cohabit and should do so' (3). Furthermore, in her attempt to deconstruct the long-held culture/nature dualism, Haraway coined the term 'cyborg' in her groundbreaking article,

‘A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s’.⁵ According to Haraway, ‘[a] cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction’ (7). She argues that ‘[b]y the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs’ (8). Haraway believes that the cyborg is a way to transcend the culture/nature duality:

No longer structured by the polarity of public and private, the cyborg defines a technological polis based partly on a revolution of social relations in the *oikos*, the household. Nature and culture are reworked; the one can no longer be the resource for appropriation or incorporation by the other. The relationships for forming wholes from parts, including those of polarity and hierarchical domination, are at issue in the cyborg world. (9, original italics)

Haraway’s cyborg is a way to challenge domination and homogenisation. Nature is no longer oppressed by culture. Nature and culture are no longer in opposition to each other; rather, they complement each other in the aspects of life. As Haraway suggests in ‘A Manifesto for Cyborgs’, ‘Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves’ (39).

Haraway not only deconstructs the culture/nature dualism, she also believes that ‘nature’ is a social construction that must be re-defined and given a new value. In her article ‘The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others’, Haraway gives a new definition to nature:

So, nature is not a physical place to which we can go, nor a treasure to fence in or bank, nor an essence to be saved or violated. Nature is not hidden and so does not need to be unveiled. Nature is not a text to be read in the codes of mathematics and biomedicine. It is not the “other” who offers origin, replenishment, and service. Neither mother, nurse, nor slave, nature is not matrix, resource, or tool for the reproduction of man. (65)

Nature, according to Haraway, is a construction: ‘It is figure, construction, artefact, movement, displacement’ (65). Consequently, in her article ‘Otherworldly Conversations;

⁵ It is worth mentioning that ‘Cyborg’ as a term was not first coined by Haraway. Haraway herself, in her article ‘Cyborgs to Companion Species: Reconfiguring Kinship in Technoscience’, admits her debt in using the term to Manfred Clynes and Nathan Kline who coined the term in 1960 ‘to refer to the enhanced man who could survive in extra-terrestrial environments. They imagined the cyborgian man-machine hybrid would be needed in the next great technohumanist challenge- space flight’ (299). However, Haraway gave the term a new meaning to fit her purposes.

Terran; Topics; Local Terms’, Haraway argues that ‘[w]e must find another relationship to nature besides reification, possession, appropriation and nostalgia’ (126). Nature, for her, is not a place for valorisation or manipulation. Haraway regards essentialism and appropriation as two ways for dominating nature. Stacy Alaimo shares with Haraway the same premise of the need to re-define nature. She maintains:

We can also shift the ground of feminist theory’s debates about difference by redefining nature itself. If nature is no longer a repository of stasis and essentialism, no longer the image of culture, then the female body need not be misogyny’s best resource. (10)

It is significant that although feminist theorist Carolyn Merchant is usually placed chronologically in second-wave feminism, her ideas are highly regarded as a prelude to third-wave feminism’s theorising of nature. In *The Death of Nature*, Merchant foregrounds this idea of redefining nature itself. In the Introduction to this book, she states:

It is not the purpose of this analysis to reinstate nature as the mother of humankind nor to advocate that women reassume the role of nurturer dictated by that historical identity. Both need to be liberated from the anthropomorphic and stereotypic labels that degrade the serious underlying issues. (xvii)

Not only does Merchant foreground the idea of giving a new definition to nature, she also foregrounds Haraway’s idea of the interconnection between nature and technology. She observes a ‘transition’ after the Scientific Revolution, ‘from the organism to the machine as the dominant metaphor binding together the cosmos, society, and the self into a single cultural reality- a world view’ (xviii). Thus, Merchant was ahead of her time when she anticipated the main premises of third-wave feminism’s stance towards nature.

Influenced by Haraway’s ideas of the cyborg and the constructed nature of ‘nature’, Italian philosopher and feminist theoretician Rosi Braidotti also seeks to deconstruct the nature/culture dualism by first redefining nature itself. In her book *Patterns of Dissonance: A Study of Women in Contemporary Philosophy*, Braidotti argues that ‘Feminist thought and post-structuralist philosophy have both crossed the frontier which separated “nature” and “culture” and so have toppled the notions of subjectivity and knowledge which occupied that frontier territory’ (130). Like Haraway, Braidotti is sceptical of the culture/nature dualism itself. She believes that this is not a real duality; it is rather a constructed ideology within culture to dominate women and nature. She maintains:

If one believes that the nature/culture opposition is *real*, one must be blind to the role of language and enunciation. Rather, I see in it one of the most persistent formulas of our culture and its discourse: nature is a cultural construction, the dream of Western theoretical discourse and its chosen moral code. (129, original italics)

Bruno Latour and Timothy Morton: The Death of Nature:

French Philosopher and anthropologist Bruno Latour similarly advocates the redefinition and reformulation of nature as a way to dismantle the culture/nature dualism. In his book *The Politics of Nature*, Latour announces the death of nature. He states that '[a]fter the death of God and the death of man, nature, too, had to give up the ghost. It was time: we were about to be unable to engage in politics any more at all' (25-26). As Haraway connected science to nature, Latour tries to connect nature to politics differently in order to put an end to the assumed public/private dualism. He believes that:

It seems much more fruitful to consider the recent emergence of political ecology as what has *put an end*, on the contrary, to the domination of the ancient infernal pairing of nature and politics, in order to substitute for it, through countless innovations, many of which remain to be introduced, the public life of a single collective. (31, original italics)

Like Haraway, and Carolyn Merchant before her, Latour proposes to put an end to the old concept of nature. He maintains that 'the terms "nature" and "society" do not designate domains of reality'; instead, they refer to a quite specific form of public organization (56).

Advocating the same idea of abandoning the old notion of nature, Timothy Morton argues that 'the very idea of "nature" which so many hold dear will have to wither away in an "ecological" state of human society. Strange as it may sound, the idea of nature is getting in the way of properly ecological forms of culture, philosophy, politics, and art' (1). According to Morton, the old idea of nature as an essentialised and valorised space is considered an obstacle militating against nature's full integration into the sphere of culture. Morton postulates that "'nature" is an arbitrary rhetorical construct, empty of independent, genuine existence behind or beyond the texts we create about it' (21-22).

Thus, third-wave feminists are fully aware of their role in continuing and complementing what their predecessors started in order to further the ends of feminism. They believe that what we have called 'women' and 'nature' can be posed as positively connected,

working to end all kinds of domination and exploitation; however, they question the very concepts themselves. They continue the task of their predecessors by not only deconstructing or reversing dualisms, but also re-defining the term ‘nature’ because, they assume, it is a construction of culture—created to dominate women and the non-human world.

Inspired by this conception of dualism as a process of constructing hierarchy, and employing Derrida’s two-process theory of deconstruction, this thesis sets out to bring a sharpened focus to feminist critical and theoretical developments, including ecofeminism, and in tandem to examine some cognate responses in the fictions of contemporary American women writers. Although the deconstruction of dualisms is at the heart of ecofeminism, this process has only imprecisely or non-systematically been examined by ecofeminist theorists. Even key and ground-breaking books—Val Plumwood’s *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993), Greta Gaard’s edited book *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature* (1993), Judith Plant’s edited book *Healing the Wounds: the Promise of Ecofeminism* (1993), and Karen J. Warren’s edited book *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature* (1997)—that have opened up the discussion about the importance of deconstructing dualisms from an ecofeminist lens in order to end oppressions, have so far not received adequate responses from ecofeminist researchers in developing this work. As far as I have been able to discover, only a handful of studies have foregrounded the question of dualism. Richard Thomas Twine’s PhD thesis ‘Ecofeminism and the ‘New’ Sociologies: A Collaboration Against Dualism’ (2001) is unusual in providing an illuminating discussion of the role that dualistic thinking plays in cultivating and fostering oppression. However, as a sociologist, Twine restricts his focus to the study of dualism from a sociological perspective and he focuses mainly on one set of dualisms: that of the mind/body, attempting in his work to develop ‘an inevitable re-conceptualisation of the “human”’, as he puts it (2). Another study is Gillian E. McCulloch’s PhD thesis ‘An Exploration of the Deconstruction of Dualism in Theology: With Special Reference to Ecofeminist Theology and New Age Spirituality’ (1996). However, although the title suggests the study would tackle the deconstruction of the soul/body dualism, surprisingly, McCulloch not only fails to celebrate the deconstruction of dualisms in ecofeminist thought, but suggests even that, theologically speaking, ‘dualisms need not always function oppressively or negatively in religious discourse’ (4). Opposite to my argument in Chapter One, she argues that the soul/body or the God/world dualisms need to be maintained rather than deconstructed because their deconstruction would threaten the Christian concept of God.

This thesis therefore aims to fill in a gap in ecofeminist discourse and, accordingly, it foregrounds an exploration of how ecofeminist thinkers, literary writers and theorists, have set about effectively deconstructing all those dualisms that have served to oppress women through the simultaneous colonisation and subjugation of nature. The thesis therefore places at its centre a detailed investigation of the theoretical and philosophical grounding of dualism. Unlike preceding studies, this thesis will not confine itself only to one discipline, but rather seeks to examine the deconstruction of dualisms by engaging with feminist, environmental, philosophical, sociological, theological, political, and literary discourses. Creating a dynamic dialogue between ecofeminist theory and literature with regard to the deconstruction of dualisms is crucial for the future development of ecofeminism. In this, literary texts have an important role to play. Toni Morrison's, Alice Walker's, and Marilynne Robinson's fiction engages us as readers experientially in ways that immersively lead to further understanding of, and ripostes to, the more abstract and often decontextualized arguments of philosophy regarding the deconstruction of dualisms. Their fiction shows how literary texts might contribute in carrying forward arguments in a more effective way by creating more immersive and experiential relations with readers that even in questioning the ontological status of fictional works themselves already disturb dualistic assumptions.

In its organisation, the thesis consists of an Introduction, three main chapters, and a Conclusion. In each of the three main chapters I will explore a dualism that has been entrenched in Western thought and investigate how ecofeminists manage to deconstruct it and redefine its terms. The three sets of dualisms that I choose to tackle in this thesis are, in order: the Transcendence/Immanence Dualism, the Public/Private Dualism, and the (Wo)man/Animal Dualism. These three are overlapping, interlocked, and mutually reinforcing; they also derive from the master, all-encompassing, gendered culture/nature dualism. I choose to tackle them in this sequence because it is my contention that the transcendence/immanence dualism is more comprehensive and leads to the other two sets of dualisms. These dualisms are key in Western thought because they are formed by power dynamics and reflect the major forms of manipulating nature and oppressing women as well as other marginalised groups. As 'linking postulates', the postulate that only men possess culture connects transcendence, the public sphere, and humanity to masculinity; on the other hand, the postulate that women are related to nature at the bottom of the hierarchy connects immanence, the private sphere, and animality to femininity. These dualisms, to use Plumwood's words, 'form a web or network. One passes easily over into the other, linked to it by well-travelled pathways of conventional or philosophical assumption' (45-46).

Just as the three dualisms are very much related, the three chapters of my thesis follow a similar pattern to each other: At the beginning of each chapter I explore the philosophical and theoretical grounding that helped establish a dualism in Western thought. Then each chapter moves on to analyse how feminists react to this gendered construction of the dualism. As feminism is not a uniform discourse as explained above, this involves examining the different attitudes of different and successive generations of feminists towards the dualism, turning lastly to how ecofeminist theorists and critics reconceptualise the dualism's terms. The last section of each chapter is related to the subtitle of the thesis: 'Theorising Contemporary American Women's Writing'. The analysis of literary texts that follows is not only grounded in the feminist theory I discuss but also examines how fiction contributes to, and expands, our theoretical understanding of these questions. My chapters move across and between the works of Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Marilynne Robinson, using them as case studies in the deconstruction of dualisms and exploring their compelling yet in most cases neglected investment in representing ecofeminist concerns via their plots, characters, settings, viewpoints, narrative worlds and narrative techniques. The contribution of this thesis is thus not only to illuminate the deconstruction of dualisms in ecofeminism, which has received some—albeit not extensive—critical attention in research on ecofeminism, but also to investigate the working out of congruent ideas in selected fiction by the three selected contemporary American women writers: Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Marilynne Robinson.⁶

⁶Toni Morrison (b. 1931 in Ohio) is a black American feminist novelist, critic, editor, and professor emeritus at Princeton University. She is a prolific writer and her literary career extends from 1970 until the present day. As a highly acclaimed writer, Morrison has received many prizes, including the Nobel Prize in literature in 1993 and the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1988. Morrison has written eleven novels: *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Tar Baby* (1981), *Beloved* (1987), *Jazz* (1992), *Paradise* (1997), *Love* (2003), *A Mercy* (2008), *Home* (2012), and *God Help the Child* (2015). She has also written literature for children, two plays, and many non-fiction works. Alice Walker (b. 1944 in Georgia) is a black American novelist, short story writer, poet, essayist, and activist. She is the recipient of awards such as the National Book Award for hardcover fiction, and the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. She has published six novels: *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970), *Meridian* (1976), *The Color Purple* (1982), *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989), *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992), and *By the Light of My Father's Smile* (1998). She has also written many short stories such as those collected in *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down: Stories* (1982), *To Hell With Dying* (1988), and *Finding the Green Stone* (1991), among others. Marilynne Robinson (b. 1943 in Idaho) is an American novelist and essayist who has also received numerous awards, including the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 2005, the 2012 National Humanities Medal, and the 2016 Library of Congress Prize for American Fiction. Robinson has written four highly acclaimed novels: *Housekeeping* (1980), *Gilead* (2004), *Home* (2008), and *Lila* (2014). She is also the author of non-fiction works including *Mother Country: Britain, the Welfare State, and Nuclear Pollution* (1989), *The Death of Adam: Essays on Modern Thought* (1998), *Absence of Mind: The Dispelling of Inwardness from the Modern Myth of the Self* (2010), *When I Was a Child I Read Books: Essays* (2012), *The Givenness of Things: Essays* (2015), and *What Are We Doing Here?* (2018).

Bringing these three writers together allows me to draw out the shared grounds between them: all are novelists and critics and belong to the same generation of feminists, one that had witnessed and actively participated in both the second-wave and third-wave of feminism. Their writing is stylistically, formally and thematically various and yet, as this thesis goes on to demonstrate, there are key shared concerns and a common persistent engagement with questions related to women's identity and the larger question of dualism and its relation to ecofeminism that is at the heart of this project. What is taken here to be most significant about Morrison, Walker and Robinson is that their work not only reflects, works through and exemplifies key theoretical concepts at the heart of ecofeminism, but they themselves also actively use their fictions as spaces of *theorisation*, using the technical resources of fiction as thought experiments as well as imaginary worlds with the capacity for ontological and other kinds of expansiveness to enhance our understanding of these and other questions. All three are initiators and instigators of theoretical debate rather than mere passive representatives of it, exposing, challenging and modifying crucial intellectual, cultural and political assumptions that pervade contemporary American culture.

Toni Morrison was one of the first black American writers to link up conversations about race and racism with scrutiny of the wider structures of American culture in both her fiction and non-fiction writings. She played a vital role in bringing black literature into the mainstream and fostered a new generation of African and black American authors when she edited the ground-breaking book *Contemporary African Literature* (1972), a collection which helped establish the names of a wide range of authors including Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe. In my analysis of her fiction, I will examine her engagement with subverting a polarisation of soul and body or religion and life (linked to the transcendence/immanence dualism) in her novel *Paradise* in Chapter One of the thesis. I will also examine her resistant alignments between humans and non-human animals in her *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* in Chapter Three. As for Alice Walker, she coined the term 'womanism' in 1983 and still inspires feminist writers to engage in a dynamic relationship with the term, to interpret and reinterpret it. Womanism will be seen to underpin her approach to narrative enquiries into spiritual renewal, self-definition and agency. For example, as will be explored in Chapter One, *The Color Purple* crystallises Walker's womanist stance when she rejects any ideological traditions of religion and presents discovery of a more liberating spirituality instead, thus deconstructing the transcendence/immanence dualism. In Chapter Two Walker will be seen to give new meanings to the public and the private spheres in *Meridian* and *The Color Purple*.

Here she poses that accessing the public sphere is not only related to national politics or engaging in political struggles; more importantly for her, it rather means gaining a voice and agency, and is achieved in tandem with new self and spiritual understanding. Moreover, Chapter Three will attempt to pinpoint Walker's view of the intersectionality of oppressions when she deconstructs the (wo)man/animal dualism in her novel *The Temple of My Familiar* and her short story 'Am I Blue?'. In addition, Marilynne Robinson, as a writer, attempts to blur the boundaries between the arenas of literature and religion, in a manner interesting for a possible 'ecotheology,' as will be explored in Chapter One in her deconstruction of the transcendence/immanence dualism in her novel *Gilead*. Robinson has also led the way in challenging the employment of wilderness as a space exclusively for male exploration and has developed consideration of women as transgressive figures in society in both her theory and fiction. This will become clear in analysis of her re-envisioning of inside and outside (as related to debates over the public/private dualism), in her novels *Housekeeping* and *Lila* in Chapter Two.

Morrison, Walker, and Robinson all demonstrate a high degree of awareness of the concerns of ecofeminism and the deconstruction of dualisms in their writings. Yet, one cannot ignore differences of ethnic background, experience and cultural specificity. Toni Morrison's words in her critical volume *Playing in the Dark* are relevant here: 'A criticism that needs to insist that literature is not only "universal" but also "race-free" risks lobotomizing that literature, and diminishes both the art and the artist' (13). Therefore, this thesis will argue that much of the time Morrison and Walker have different purposes in deconstructing dualisms to those of Robinson. All three share an understanding that these Western dualisms are gendered, but Morrison and Walker go further to put forth that they are racialised as well. Labels and categories such as spiritual ecofeminist, postcolonial ecofeminist, and transformative ecofeminist can be restrictive in recognising these writers' creativity, their variety of themes and what they share. Therefore, my focus will be rather on the response to the dualisms themselves to demonstrate in what ways and how, similarly or differently, Morrison, Walker, and Robinson deconstruct the transcendence/immanence, public/private, and (wo)man/animal dualisms, and with what effects.

To recapitulate, the main questions that this thesis sets out to answer are: How have these dualisms been gendered in Western philosophy? Although Western philosophers focused on different sets of dualisms in their writings (for Descartes it is on mind/body, for Hegel it is on universality/particularity, for Marx it is on production/reproduction, to mention

a few), how are these dualisms related to the culture/nature and the man/woman dualisms? How can we chart or model feminist reactions to, and deconstructions of, these dualisms? What can we learn by exploring the theorising performed by literary texts that engage with such issues? How do Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Marilynne Robinson, as key American writers who straddle second and third wave feminisms, including the rise and dissemination of ecofeminism, approach these pairs of dualisms, and how do their purposes and emphases vary in doing so?

CHAPTER ONE: Deconstructing the Transcendence/Immanence Dualism: Ecofeminist Encounters with Philosophy and Theology

You believed you could transcend the body as you aged, she tells herself. You believed you could rise above it, to a serene, nonphysical realm. But it's only through ecstasy you can do that, and ecstasy is achieved through the body itself. Without the bone and sinew of wings, no flight. Without that ecstasy you can only be dragged further down by the body, into its machinery. Its rusting, creaking, vengeful, brute machinery.⁷

The paired concepts of transcendence and immanence play a crucial role in Western thought. The issue of the transcendence/immanence dualism is much debated in the philosophical, theological, and feminist arenas. Linguistically, transcendence means to go beyond; and immanence means to be limited or confined within. According to Patrice Haynes in her book *Immanent Transcendence*,

[i]n western thought, the term “transcendence” is a controversial and overdetermined one with a long history in both philosophy and theology. Nevertheless, in its most general sense, transcendence signals “the beyond,” with the noun form of the term denoting a reality beyond the world—*the transcendent*—and the verb form denoting the activity of moving beyond—to *transcend*. (1, original italics)

By contrast, she defines immanence as ‘that which remains within certain limits or bounds’ (1). The concepts of transcendence and immanence feature in both philosophy and theology but have acquired different meanings in these two contexts. In his article ‘Topologies of Transcendence’, David Wood contends that ‘[t]ranscendence has many names—freedom, love, God, and so on’ (172). John D. Caputo also defines transcendence in his article ‘Temporal Transcendence’ as ‘a relative term’ that ‘depends upon what is being transcended or gone “beyond”’ (188).

Yet, the meanings of transcendence and immanence in philosophical and theological contexts converge; they are not separate from each other. Many thinkers from both domains confirm the religious-philosophical aspects of transcendence and immanence. For example, Catherine Keller argues that ‘[l]ike a rumor, transcendence drifts between philosophy and

⁷This excerpt is taken from Margaret Atwood’s short story ‘Torching the Dusties’ in her collection of short stories *Stone Mattress: Nine Tales* (p. 290). In this quotation, Atwood brilliantly expresses the essence of this chapter, i.e., how the body can be a path to transcendence and to going upward rather than a means for getting immersed in immanence. It is the medium through which feminists often deconstruct the transcendence/immanence dualism.

theology. One doesn't know quite where the concept originates. Immanent to both discourses, it emanates elusively, tantalizingly, from each, toward the other' (129). In the same vein, in his *Metaphysics: The Creation of Hierarchy*, Adrian Pabst points out that, generally, philosophy and theology cannot be separated in Western thought, especially with respect to the notions of transcendence and immanence. He maintains that '[t]he relationship between philosophy and theology has arguably been the main determinant in the history of ideas since the encounter of biblical revelation and ancient reason' (157). In Pabst's view,

[i]f one is to believe much of contemporary philosophy, modern metaphysics is constitutively and irreducibly *onto-theological* [...]. But if "postmodernity" is at the end an intensification of certain modern ideas rather than a new phase of history, perhaps it is then also the case that modern onto-theology and postmodern philosophy are not diametrically opposed to each other but instead part of the same tradition. (305, my italics)

Indeed, as Pabst maintains in the above quotation, not only do philosophy and theology converge with each other, but they also intersect with postmodern thought. In this respect, transcendence and immanence have become of importance not only to philosophers and theologians, but also to feminist and, recently, postcolonial thinkers.

In classical and modern metaphysics, the relationship between transcendence and immanence has been defined as of direct opposition. David Wood states: 'I am thinking particularly here of how such ideas as inside/outside, self/other, us/them, friend/enemy—and hence immanent/transcendent—operate as exclusively binary oppositions' (171). Transcendence and immanence have been viewed as a hierarchical and reductive binary in which transcendence is superior to and ruling over immanence. Crucially for my study, this dualism of transcendence/immanence paved the way for patriarchy to subordinate women and nature. This can be traced back to Plato and through all metaphysical philosophers such as Descartes, Kant, Hegel, and Sartre. In modern and postmodern times, feminists have recognised that the transcendence/immanence dualism is gendered in both philosophical and theological contexts. It is burdened with sexist and racist discourses. In metaphysical history and culture, transcendence has positively been defined as everything that belongs to culture or the elevated. It is God, culture, rationality, the mind, reason, production, the soul, the spirit, spirituality, the human, and man, among other things. On the other hand, immanence has pejoratively and negatively been defined as everything that culture excludes. For example, it is the world, nature, irrationality, the body, emotions, reproduction, the flesh, physicality, the

nonhuman, and women. Caputo and Scanlon pose in their introduction to *Transcendence and Beyond*:

We recognized, for example, that the classical idea of transcendence is not without a gender and a sexuality, and that the issue we raise in this collection is deeply fraught with implications for feminist theory. It is a classically patriarchal model, representing a top-down, hierarchical, even imperial way to conceive the relationship of the divine to the human, and which has served, by unhappy extension, as a model of the relation of the masculine to the feminine and of the human to the nonhuman. So at the same time that it is a feminist issue, transcendence also poses an ecological issue. The two conceptions are [...] internally linked by means of the idea of hierarchical and sovereign power, and they represent parallel or twin forms of transcendence—that of “man” over women and “man” over nature—each constructed on the model of God’s transcendence over the world. (4)

Once conscious of this patriarchal scheme of rendering women and nature inferior through the transcendence/immanence dualism, feminists and ecofeminists attempted to deconstruct this long-established dualism. They also reconsidered and re-envisioned the concepts of transcendence and immanence themselves. As I will explore, for feminists, transcendence is transcending otherness rather than transcending nature and all its components.

This leads us to the essence of this chapter. As outlined in my Introduction, this thesis is concerned with pinpointing how ecofeminists use deconstruction as an effective tool to dismantle the culture/nature dualism and all the other sets of sub-dualisms that it generates. The main aim of this chapter is to discuss how ecofeminist critics and writers draw on deconstruction to break down the transcendence/immanence dualism, which helped patriarchal society subjugate both women and nature from Plato onwards. In this chapter, feminist and ecofeminist views regarding the issue of transcendence/immanence are brought from philosophy and theology into direct dialogue with literature. The first section enters into theoretical and philosophical discussions of the transcendence/immanence dualism in Western philosophy and theology and of how feminists and ecofeminists managed to deconstruct this metaphysically-burdened dualism. The second section offers an account and exploration of how Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Marilynne Robinson—as feminists and ecofeminists—deconstruct the transcendence/immanence dualism in their literary works, in an attempt to liberate women, nature, and all marginalised groups. It shows how these writers participate in their fiction in a live dialogue with theory and how their fiction itself performs

philosophical theorising rather than merely reflecting the ideas of theorists and philosophers. Thus, the chapter aims to demonstrate, to use Caputo and Scanlon's words, 'how this classical idea of transcendence plays out in a postmodern context—what it would mean, how it would need to be rethought, and whether we need in fact to get beyond its classical beyond to a more postmodern beyond' (2).

Transcendence and Immanence in Philosophical-Theological Metaphysics:

In his article 'The Impossible for Man-God', French philosopher and theologian Jean-Luc Marion points out that transcendence is defined in philosophy 'with respect to consciousness, precisely as what surpasses the immanence of consciousness to itself' (17). Indeed, from Plato onwards, transcendence has been used as a philosophical term to refer to culture, essence, the mind, consciousness, rationality, reason, and being; whereas immanence has been used pejoratively to refer to nature, materiality, the body, sensibility, irrationality, emotions, and becoming. Theologically, transcendence is related to God and the sacred, and immanence is related to the world and the mundane. Although Plato did not use the terms 'transcendence' and 'immanence' explicitly, the concepts within the sets of dualisms and hierarchies that he articulated are strongly suggestive of transcendence and immanence. Plato's terms inspired different and successive generations of philosophers, theologians, and literary writers to conceptualise transcendence and immanence in the way they are commonly understood today.

Plato began with a polarisation of body and soul. Soul, for him, is the mind, knowledge, being, consciousness, etc. He states in the *Phaedo* that 'the soul is by itself apart from the body. While we live we shall be closest to knowledge if we refrain as much as possible from association with the body and do not join with it more than we must' (58). He adds that 'when the soul and the body are together, nature orders the one to be subject and to be ruled, and the other to rule and be master' (70). In Plato's account, the soul is independent and self-conscious as it gathers 'itself together, by itself, to trust only itself and whatever reality, existing by itself, the soul by itself understands' (72). In the *Republic*, Plato uses the words 'upwards' and 'downwards' to imply transcendence and immanence. He maintains that '[i]f anyone attempts to learn something about sensible things, [...] his soul is looking not *up* but *down*' (1145, my italics). From the *Republic* onwards, Plato begins using the words 'being' and 'becoming' as the closest terms to today's transcendence and immanence.

According to Plato, every soul must engage in a journey upward from becoming to being. He contends that philosophers ‘have to learn to rise up out of becoming and grasp being, if they are ever to become rational’ and they must learn how to turn the soul around ‘away from becoming and towards truth and being’ (*Republic* 1142). Becoming is the process of moving towards being; during this process things are likely to change and they are visible and grasped by the senses. On the other hand, in ‘being’, things are changeless; they are invisible and grasped by the mind. In addition, in *Timaeus*, Plato uses two other phrases that are also suggestive of transcendence and immanence. He differentiates between ‘things that are to be’ and ‘those that are always changeless’ (1241). ‘Things that are to be’ are related to becoming, to immanence; whereas ‘things that really are’ are related to being, to transcendence.

Plato explicitly relates men to transcendence and women to immanence. He claims that anything related to the flesh and the senses is of inferior rank. He claims in the *Symposium* that the Form—which is a synonym for transcendence and being—is ‘absolute, pure, unmixed, not polluted by human flesh or colors or any other great nonsense of mortality’ (494). According to Plato, everything that is opposite to the Form or being can be found ‘mostly in children, women, household slaves, and in those of the inferior majority who are called free’ (*Republic* 1063). Plato contemptuously asks: ‘Do you know of anything practiced by human beings in which the male sex isn’t superior to the female in all these ways?’ (*Republic* 1083). He believes that females tend to excel only in ‘ridiculous’ tasks such as ‘weaving, baking cakes, and cooking vegetables’ (*Republic* 1083). Although he admits that there may be some women who can be doctors, philosophers, or guardians, Plato categorises these ‘exceptional’ women as more masculine than feminine.⁸ He comments: ‘Then women of this sort must be chosen along with men of the same sort to live with them and share their guardianship, seeing that they are adequate for the task and *akin to the men in nature*’ (*Republic* 1083, my italics)

This Platonic inheritance runs through to modernity, shaping the rationalist tradition and the work of key philosopher for modernity, the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), who similarly maintains the transcendence/immanence dualism and in effect serves to endorse the superiority and desirability therefore of transcendence over immanence in the domains of epistemology and ethics. In his seminal work *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), Kant divides cognitive capacities into ‘reason’ and ‘understanding’. He postulates that reason is transcendent and that understanding is immanent: ‘We will call the principles

⁸ Early feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Simone de Beauvoir typify this ‘masculinising’ stance as indicated in the Introduction of the thesis and as will be examined throughout.

whose application stays wholly and completely within the limits of possible experience **immanent**, but those that would fly beyond these boundaries **transcendent** principles' (385, original emphasis). According to Kant, '[r]eason presupposes those cognitions of understanding which are first applied to experience, and seeks the unity of these cognitions in accordance with ideas that go much further than experience can reach' (601). He states more explicitly that 'understanding is concerned only with **things in themselves** and not with appearances' (644, original emphasis). Thus, for Kant, understanding is like Plato's process of becoming; it is related to immanence and experience. On the other hand, reason is similar to Plato's being. It is related to transcendence. By analogy, it can be extrapolated from Kant's thinking that women are related to the lower realm of understanding, experience, immanence and things in themselves; whilst men are related to the higher realm of reason, transcendence and things for themselves.

The works of the German philosopher of the late Enlightenment, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), provided a further step in fostering the transcendence/immanence dualism, with the emphasis in his writing again on the subordination of immanence to transcendence. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), Hegel uses 'spirit' in a very similar sense to Plato's 'soul'. Spirit, for Hegel, signifies mind or consciousness. In Hegel's account, the relationship between men and women is, and must always be, built on duality and all relations are based on struggle. He regards men and women as two consciousnesses and, for him, women must therefore submit their consciousness to men. According to Hegel, 'the relation of the two self-conscious individuals is such that they prove themselves and each other through a life-and-death struggle. They must engage in this struggle, for they must raise their certainty of being *for themselves* to truth, both in the case of the other and in their own case' (113-114, original italics). He distinguishes between 'being-for-itself' and the 'being-in-itself'. 'Being-for-itself' is related to transcendence; whereas 'being-in-itself' is related to immanence. He states:

The individual who has not risked his life may well be recognized as a *person*, but he has not attained to the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness. Similarly, just as each stakes his own life, so each must seek the other's death, for it values the other no more than itself; its essential being is present to it in the form of an "other", it is outside of itself and must rid itself of its self-externality. The other is an *immediate* consciousness entangled in a variety of relationships, and it must regard its otherness as a pure being-for-self or as an absolute negation. (114, original italics)

Hegel maintains that among humans there are ‘persons’ and ‘self-consciousnesses’. For him, the independent self-consciousness or the full human being is the one who risks his life and engages in ‘a life-and-death struggle’ with the other in order to prove himself as a ‘being-for-itself’; whereas this other is denied individuality and is regarded as a mere person, a ‘being-in-itself’. Hegel puts it clearly that it is woman who must submit her consciousness to man because woman is immanent and man is transcendent. He notoriously postulates that woman’s consciousness goes downwards towards ‘the nether world’; whilst man’s consciousness goes upwards. He claims that:

The union of man and woman constitutes the active middle term of the whole and the element which sunders itself into these extremes of divine and human law. It is equally their immediate union which converts those first two syllogisms into one and the same syllogism, and unites into one process the opposite movements: one from actuality down to unreality, the *downward movement of human law*, organized into independent members, to the danger and trial of death; and the other, the *upward movement of the law of the nether world* to the actuality of the light of day and to conscious existence. Of these movements, *the former falls to man, the latter to woman.* (278, my italics)

In the same vein, Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), takes his cue from Hegel in the metaphysical degradation of women as immanent. In his *Being and Nothingness* (1943), Sartre famously differentiates between being-in-itself and being-for-itself. Following his predecessors, he uses the word ‘being’ to mean ‘consciousness’ or ‘knowing’. According to Sartre, ‘[k]nowledge appears then as *a mode of being*. *Knowing* is neither a relation established after the event between two beings, nor is it an activity of one of these two beings, nor is it a quality of a property or a virtue. It is the very being of *the for-itself*’ (174, my italics). Thus, being-for-itself is related to knowing, it is a self-conscious being, whereas being-in-itself is a dependent being that does not have consciousness. Sartre claims that the being-for-itself is superior to the being-in-itself. He contends: ‘It is in the for-itself alone that we must look for the key to that relation of being which we call, for example, knowing. The for-itself is responsible in its being for its relation with the in-itself’ (172). In Sartre’s view,

[t]he for-itself [is] the foundation of this concrete being [...]. The for-itself is an encountered-choice; that is, it is defined as a choice of founding the being which it encounters. This means that the for-itself as an individual enterprise is a choice of this world, as an individual totality of being; it does not surpass it towards a logical universal but towards a new concrete “state” of the same world, in which being would

be an in-itself founded by the for-itself; that is, it surpasses it towards a concrete-being-beyond-the-concrete-existing-being. (598)

From this standpoint Sartre proceeds to expound his view of women. He notoriously presents woman as an immanent Other that must be transcended (378). He postulates that:

[M]an, being transcendence, establishes the meaningful by his very coming into the world, and the meaningful because of the very structure of transcendence is a reference to other transcendents which can be interpreted without recourse to the subjectivity which has established it. The potential energy of a body is an objective quality of that body which can be objectively calculated while taking into account unique objective circumstances. And yet this energy can come to dwell in a body only in a world whose appearance is a correlate of that of a for-itself. (602)

Here Sartre equates man's consciousness with transcendence and sovereign subjectivity. For him, man's existence is meaningful because he engages with the world—an idea that relates transcendence to the public sphere as will be examined in Chapter Two. On the other hand, woman, implicitly, is related to immanence because, for Sartre, she is a body or an object that acquires meaning through the subjectivity of man.

Feminism and the Transcendence/Immanence Dualism:

Keeping in mind all the negative connotations that accrued around the notion of immanence, early feminists questioned woman's alignment with immanence. In various ways, they attempted to relate themselves to the realm of transcendence instead. (This attitude is exemplified by Simone de Beauvoir's philosophical stance regarding this issue as will be examined below). Yet, postmodern feminists have used deconstruction as a way to overcome the transcendence/immanence dualism. For postmodern feminists, there is no need for women to be separated from immanence or to align themselves to transcendence. What is more important for them is, first, to re-define and reconceptualise the concepts of transcendence and immanence and, second, to break down the duality between them. This brings us back to Derrida's two-stage process of deconstruction. As Caputo aptly puts it:

It may be helpful at this juncture to recall Derrida's two strategies of deconstruction. On the one hand there is the strategy of "a deconstruction without changing the terrain, by repeating what is implicit in the founding concepts and the original problematic," and on the other hand a deconstruction that makes an effort "to change terrain, in a discontinuous and irruptive fashion, by brutally placing oneself outside, and by affirming an absolute break and difference" [...]. We need to work with the concepts

and metaphors that have been delivered to us, and the task of critical inquiry is to use them against themselves in an effort to articulate new landscapes for thought and action. The lesson to be learned from this is that the truth of deconstruction resides in the recognition that no complete deconstruction is possible. (212)

In his 'Positions: Interview with Jean-Louis Houdebine and Guy Scarpetta', Derrida states that the '*strategy of deconstruction*' 'is to avoid both simply *neutralizing* the binary oppositions of metaphysics and simply *residing* within the closed field of these oppositions, thereby confirming it' (41, original italics). According to Derrida,

[t]o deconstruct the opposition, first of all, is to overturn the hierarchy at a given moment. To overlook this phase of overturning is to forget the conflictual and subordinating structure of oppositions. Therefore one might proceed too quickly to a *neutralization* that in *practice* would leave the previous field untouched, leaving one no hold on the previous opposition, thereby preventing any means of *intervening* in the field effectively. (41, original italics)

Derrida believes that deconstruction is not a concept; it is rather a project or a process which consists of two stages. The first stage is to overturn the hierarchy of dual opposition—this is what Simone de Beauvoir set out to achieve regarding the transcendence/immanence dualism. However, in Derrida's view, to remain in the phase of overturning 'is still to operate on the terrain of and from within the deconstructed system' ('Positions' 42). Therefore, it was necessary for feminists to take up the second phase of deconstruction—that is, displacement. In *Margins of Philosophy*, Derrida contends that 'deconstruction cannot limit itself or proceed immediately to a neutralization: it must, by means of a double gesture, a double science, a double writing, practice an *overturning* of the classical opposition *and* a general *displacement* of the system' (329, original italics). Deconstruction, for Derrida, 'does not consist in passing from one concept to another, but in overturning and displacing a conceptual other' (*Margins of Philosophy* 329).

Though not conceived as such, the attitude of successive generations of feminists towards the transcendence/immanence dualism can be read as mirroring Derrida's two stages of the process of deconstruction. At the beginning, feminists overturned or inverted the dualism and kept its hierarchical implications untouched. Then, they began problematising the terms of the dualism themselves. These two stages will be taken up in detail in what follows.

The First Phase: Simone de Beauvoir: Transcendence as Transcending Femininity and Materiality

Catherine Keller believes that Beauvoir ‘marks the immanent as the other of transcendence, its opposite and barrier’ (136). In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir calls for women to revolt against their immanence and to claim their transcendence by joining culture and separating themselves from nature. Although Beauvoir uses transcendence and immanence in different senses, as will be shown below, all of these senses are built on and derived from the above-mentioned classical and modern metaphysical views of transcendence/immanence. In Beauvoir’s view, transcendence is related to anything that belongs to the realm of culture rather than nature. It is related to God, man, the public sphere, subjectivity, agency, and independence, among other things. Beauvoir is influenced by both philosophy and theology in her usage of the terms transcendence and immanence. Philosophically, she uses transcendence to mean ‘consciousness’. Theologically, she uses it to refer to God in contrast to the immanent world. She follows the patriarchal view of metaphysical philosophers in relating transcendence exclusively to men and relating immanence to women. Beauvoir argues that transcendence has always been incarnated in the phallus (74). She explains that ‘[t]he ovule has sometimes been likened to immanence, the sperm to transcendence, and it has been said that the sperm penetrates the female element only in losing its transcendence, its motility’ (41).

Transcendence, for Beauvoir, means ‘living above mere life’ (90). Here Beauvoir draws on Hegel’s above-mentioned view that transcendence is related to risking rather than maintaining life. According to Beauvoir, man risks his life; whilst woman gives and preserves life through giving birth and nurturing children. She contends that man is understood to live transcendently—above mere life—when he engages in risky ‘projects’ such as fighting and hunting. She relays that ‘[i]t is because man is a being of transcendence and ambition that he projects new urgencies through every new tool’ (83). Man, for Beauvoir, ‘transcended his animal nature’ by means of his acts (89). She claims that in this dominant discourse man is raised above the animal when he *risks* his life, not when he *gives* life (89, my italics). She argues that projects such as war, hunting, and fishing represent ‘an expansion of existence, its projection towards the world’ (99). In this way, ‘the male remained alone the incarnation of transcendence’ (99). In Beauvoir’s account, metaphysical thought presents man as

the transcendent, he *soars* in the *sky* of heroes, woman *crouches* on *earth*, beneath his feet; it amuses him to measure the distance that separates him from her; from time to time he raises her up to him, takes her, and then throws her back; never does he lower himself down to her realm of slimy shadows. (256, my italics)

In addition, Beauvoir exposes that the main reason for the transcendence of man is that his vocation within the system of marriage is ‘to produce, fight, create, progress, to transcend himself towards the totality of the universe and the infinity of the future, but traditional marriage does not invite woman to transcend herself with him; it confines her in immanence, shuts her up within the circle of herself’ (435).

Thus, the first sense of transcendence for Beauvoir is to engage in ‘exploits or projects’, as she calls them, outside the domestic sphere (27). This leads us to Beauvoir’s second sense of transcendence. She believes that transcendence is related to subjectivity and agency; and because women are treated as objects and are denied agency, they are immanent. According to Beauvoir,

[e]very subject plays his part as such specifically through exploits or projects that serve as a mode of transcendence; he achieves liberty only through a continual reaching out towards other liberties [...]. Every time transcendence falls back into immanence, stagnation, there is a degradation of existence into the “*en-soi*”—the brutish life of subjection to given conditions—and of liberty into constraint and contingency. (27, original italics)

Beauvoir perceives that immanence ‘is the lot assigned to woman in the patriarchy’ (262). In her view, the main reason for woman’s immanent status is her consideration as an object or an Other that must be transcended by the subjectivity of man. She claims:

Now, what peculiarly signalizes the situation of woman is that she—a free and autonomous being like all human creatures—nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other. They propose to stabilize her as object and *to doom her to immanence* by another ego (conscience) which is essential and sovereign. (27, my italics)

Beauvoir laments the fact that woman is ‘the mysterious Other who is deep in immanence and far-off transcendence’ (197). Woman is envisaged as ‘the Other in whom the subject transcends himself without being limited’ (201). This moves us on to Beauvoir’s conception of immanence. By immanence she means “being-in-itself”, “stagnation”, “imitation”, “materiality”, and “lack of self-consciousness”. According to Beauvoir, woman ‘remained doomed to immanence, incarnating only the *static* aspect of society, *closed in upon itself*’ (99, my italics). Here Beauvoir’s analysis identifies the metaphysical view of woman

as being-in-itself, a person that does not have significance outside the domestic sphere in which she lives. Her life is static and stagnated because there is nothing new in it; her life is a mere imitation and repetition. At this point, Beauvoir echoes Plato's pejorative notion of imitation and of women as imitators. In *Menexenus*, Plato introduces the idea that woman imitates nature and the earth in conceiving, giving birth, and nurturing. He says that the 'earth does not mimic woman in conceiving and generating, but woman earth' (955). Another sense of imitation for Plato is that women not only imitate the earth through their reproductive system, but they also imitate men through their dependence on them. According to Plato—and this resonates in Beauvoir's view—women are mere imitators because they do not create new things; they just preserve life and maintain it by giving birth and nurturing. Plato expresses this idea in *Timaeus*: 'It is in fact appropriate to compare the receiving thing to a mother, the source to a father' (1253). He adds: 'The things that enter and leave it are imitations of those things that always are' (1253).

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, in their *A Thousand Plateaus*, rightly critique and reject the Platonic being/imitation dualism, which is synonymous with the transcendence/immanence dualism. They believe that '[w]e fall into a false alternative if we say that you either imitate or you are' (238). Commenting on Plato's view of imitation, they state that:

Nature is conceived as an enormous *mimesis*: either in the form of a chain of beings perpetually imitating one another, progressively and regressively, and tending toward the divine higher term they all imitate by graduated resemblance, as the model for and principle behind the series; or in the form of a mirror Imitation with nothing left to imitate because it itself is the model everything else imitates. (234-235, original italics)

According to Deleuze and Guattari, '[a] becoming is not a correspondence between relations. But neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or, at the limit, an identification' (237). They add that becoming is a process that has significance in itself and cannot be reduced to mere imitation. According to them, '[b]ecoming is certainly not imitating, or identifying with something, neither is it regressing-progressing [...]. Becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own; it does not reduce to, or lead back to "appearing," "being," "equality," or "producing"' (239). Moreover, in his *Dialogues* with Claire Parnet, Deleuze stresses the fact that '[t]o become is never to imitate, nor to "do like", nor to conform to a model, whether it's of justice or of truth' (2). Becoming, for Deleuze and Guattari, is not reduced to imitation in the Platonian negative sense. It is rather an endless process of generating new meanings to 'being'.

In her book *Theatres of Immanence*, Laura Cull also rejects the Platonic idea of associating immanence with mimesis or imitation pejoratively—an idea that Beauvoir inherited and perpetuated. In her analysis of Deleuze, Cull maintains that Deleuze’s philosophy

is defined by its attempt to overturn Platonism, as *the* philosophical tradition associated with subordination of difference and identity, and with the failure to conceive a difference-in-itself as anything but a mere deviation from the same. Here, then, the term “mimesis” (and indeed the term “mimicry”) tends to be associated with the Platonic demotion of imitation, as the production of an impoverished copy of a fixed and self-present original. (120-121, original italics)

Thus, Beauvoir to some extent relies on immanence in Plato’s sense in order to indicate stagnation and imitation. Significantly for my thesis on ecofeminism, another sense of immanence for Beauvoir is sensuality and materiality. She charts how within patriarchy woman is ‘doomed to immanence’ because of her body. She claims that:

When woman is given over to a man as his property, he demands that she represent the flesh purely for its own sake. Her body is not perceived as the radiation of a subjective personality, but as a thing *sunk deeply in immanence*; it is not for such a body to have reference to the rest of the world, it must not be the promise of things other than itself. (176, my italics)

In Beauvoir’s view, woman’s main problem is that she has been defined as sensual and aligned with the material by man, and thus is imprisoned in her body. She maintains that in this sense ‘woman is absorbed in her sentiment, she is all inwardness; she is dedicated to immanence’ (229). She adds: ‘It is said that woman is sensual, she wallows in immanence; but she has first been shut up in it’ (572). For Beauvoir, woman’s ‘domestic labours that fell to her lot because they were reconcilable with the cares of maternity imprisoned her in repetition and immanence’ (88). She contrasts women’s immanent domestic chores in the private sphere with men’s transcendent heroic exploits in the public sphere (an issue that will be explored in the following chapter of the thesis). She claims that the fact that transcendence is denied for woman prevents her from ‘attaining the loftiest human attitudes: heroism, revolt, disinterestedness, imagination, creation’ (591). She fears that women are destined ‘to the repetition of daily tasks, identified with ready-made values, respectful of public opinion and seeking on earth nothing but a vague comfort’ (592). In Beauvoir’s view, reproduction is ‘bondage’ and ‘a terrible handicap in the struggle against a hostile world. Pregnancy, childbirth, and menstruation reduced [women’s] capacity for work and made them at times

wholly dependent upon the men for protection and food' (88). This materiality, for Beauvoir, causes woman's existence to be

earthy, commonplace, basely utilitarian [...] because she is compelled to devote her existence to cooking and washing diapers—no way to acquire a sense of grandeur! It is her duty to assure the *monotonous repetition of life* in all its mindless factuality. It is natural for woman *to repeat*, to begin again without ever *inventing*. (573, my italics)

Beauvoir's sense of immanence as a repetition of life in contrast to transcendence as inventing and contributing leads to her explicit understanding of immanence as being-in-itself. She states:

Every time transcendence falls back into immanence, stagnation, there is a degradation of existence into the "*en-soi*" [...]. This downfall represents a moral fault if the subject consents to it; if it is inflicted upon him, it spells frustration and oppression. In both cases it is an absolute evil. (27, original italics)

In Beauvoir's account, woman's existence lacks aim and 'her life is not directed towards ends: she is absorbed in producing or caring for things that are never more than means, such as food, clothing, and shelter. These things are inessential intermediaries between animal life and free existence' (574). For Beauvoir, woman's horizon is thus limited; she is 'enclosed within the limits of her ego or her household' (574).

Despite her critique of patriarchal definitions, Beauvoir's philosophical reflection on the concepts of transcendence and immanence is metaphysically-burdened. It draws fundamentally on Hegel's and Sartre's ideals. Yet, it can also be traced back to Plato. Beauvoir overturned the terms of the transcendence/immanence dualism and attempted to attach women to transcendence to break their imprisonment in immanence. She repudiates one kind of exclusion, but she reinforces another as she implicitly accepts the downgrading of women. Yet, Beauvoir inadvertently introduces the idea of transcendence in immanence—an idea that inspired later generations of feminists. She observes ironically that some women 'are attempting to justify their existence in the midst of their immanence—that is, to realize *transcendence in immanence*. It is the ultimate effort—sometimes *ridiculous*, often pathetic—of imprisoned woman to transform her prison into a heaven of glory, her servitude into sovereign liberty' (595, my italics). As we will see, it is this very idea of transcendence in immanence, described by Beauvoir in the form she identifies as 'ridiculous', that gives later feminists the clue to deconstruct and redefine the transcendence/immanence dualism instead of simply inverting its terms. Significantly, Beauvoir's stance was crucial as the first stage in the process of deconstruction. Her attitude inspired feminists to proceed to the

second stage of deconstructing the transcendence/immanence dualism. Indeed, Beauvoir's philosophical enquiries into the issue of transcendence and immanence provided a key impetus for later feminists to revisit this issue. According to Keller, Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* 'made a way for women in the desert of patriarchy' (135-136).

The Second Phase: Redefining the Concepts of Transcendence and Immanence:

Although Beauvoir's thinking preserved the transcendence/immanence dualism, it was 'strategic'—in the sense used by Derrida and Spivak. Her words were a departure point for feminists to reconfigure the transcendence/immanence issue. From the 1960s on, especially after the shift from feminist epistemology to feminist ontology, feminists have become sceptical of Beauvoir's approach to the transcendence/immanence dualism. Patrice Haynes maintains in *Immanent Transcendence* that 'de Beauvoir takes a wrong turn in seeking to liberate women from their position as man's other' (89). Some feminists began to redefine the concepts of transcendence and immanence and began to envisage immanence differently and positively. In addition to deconstruction which is considered a crucial auxiliary and subsidiary factor, there are two main strands of thought that helped feminists reconsider their conceptualisation of transcendence and immanence: firstly, restoring the body in what can be called "feminism of embodiment" and, secondly, ecofeminism.

From the 1960s onwards, culminating in the 1980s, feminists began to reconsider their views of the body, materiality, and sexual difference. In doing this, they brought to bear ideas from philosophy and theology, attempting to de-metaphysicalise the notions of embodiment and materiality in both domains. Other than being influenced by the thought of Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, and almost all classical, medieval, and modern metaphysical philosophers (exceptions might include, e.g., the work of Spinoza) in inferiorising the body and subordinating it to the mind, it was Sigmund Freud's famous motto 'biology is destiny' which entrenched this issue in the minds of early twentieth-century feminists. Freud notoriously states that 'anatomy is destiny' (665), indicating that females are destined to certain inferior roles and males to other superior roles in society. In response to such determinism, for a long time feminists negated their materiality, attempting to break the link between woman and body. They viewed any link to the body as essentialism built around biological sexual difference, until some modern feminists restored value to the bodily, benefiting from both philosophy, especially phenomenology, and theology.

In her groundbreaking book *The Man of Reason* (1984), Australian philosopher and feminist Genevieve Lloyd presents powerful insights for feminists, arguing for reconsideration of the ‘genderization’ of the reason/body duality’ (37). Lloyd rightly states that ‘it is not female biology itself, we may say, that poses the obstacle to a feminine transcendence, but rather what men, with the connivance of women, have made of the female biology’ (101). She suggests that ‘the ideal of transcendence is [...] a male ideal; that it feeds on the exclusion of the feminine. This is what makes the ideal of a feminine attainment of transcendence paradoxical’ (103). There are, indeed, a number of feminists of embodiment—such as Toril Moi, Elizabeth Grosz, Rosi Braidotti, and Luce Irigaray—who present remarkable ideas for restoring the female body and stressing sexual difference. They reject the sex/gender distinction, indicating that the differences between men and women cannot simply be attributed to social and cultural differences and that sexual differences must also be considered in more foundational terms. Their critique is based on the postulation that the sex/gender distinction endorsed by feminists themselves helped to reinforce and widen the dualistic gap between the mind/body, nature/culture, transcendence/immanence, and in all other dualisms. In her book *Metamorphoses*, Rosi Braidotti states: ‘I want to think through the body, not in a flight away from it’ (5). She maintains that ‘[o]ne of the aims of feminist practice is to overthrow the pejorative, oppressive connotations that are built not only into the notion of difference, but also into the dialects of Self and Other’ (11). In Braidotti’s view, ‘The female feminist subject starts with the revaluation of the bodily roots of subjectivity, rejecting any universal, neutral and consequently gender-free understanding of human embodiment’ (22). She stresses ‘the importance of sexuality in feminist thought, where it is perceived critically as the site of power, struggles, and contradictions’ (25), and adds ‘that both sexuality and sexual difference are so central to the constitution of the subject that they cannot be eradicated merely by reversing socially-enforced gender roles. Instead, in-depth transformations or metamorphoses need to be enacted’ (38).

In her book *On Female Body Experience*, Iris Marion Young also speaks positively about female embodiment. She argues that:

“The feminine” signifies a relational position in a dichotomy, masculine/feminine, where the first is more highly valued than the second, and where the second is partly defined as a lack with respect to the first. This dichotomy lines up with others that have a homologous hierarchical logic, such as mind/body, reason/passion, public/private, hard science/soft science, and dozens of other value-laden

dichotomies whose discursive application has practical effects in personal lives, workplaces, media imagery, and politics, to name only a few social fields. (5)

Young calls for attention to ‘subjectivity and women’s experience as lived and felt in the flesh’ (7). She follows phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty in ‘theorizing consciousness itself as embodied’ (7). According to Young, ‘[t]he idea of the lived body, moreover, refuses the distinction between nature and culture that grounds a distinction between sex and gender’ (17).

In the same vein, in her book *Imaginary Bodies*—a collection of essays written between 1983 and 1994—feminist philosopher Moira Gatens rejects the neutrality of the body. According to Gatens, ‘[c]oncerning the neutrality of the body, let me be explicit, there is no neutral body, there are at least two kinds of bodies: the male body and the female body’ (8). She explains further:

The point is that the body can and does intervene to confirm or to deny various social significances in a way that lends an air of inevitability to patriarchal social relations. A thorough analysis of the construction of the specificity of female experience, which takes account of the female *body*, is essential to dispelling this “air”. To slide from “male” and “female” experience to “masculine” and “feminine” experience further confuses the issue. (10, original italics)

Just as Young introduces above the idea of ‘the lived body’, Gatens presents the idea of ‘the situated body’. She praises the work of feminists of embodiment and sexual difference, stating that: ‘Theorists of sexual difference do not take as their object of study the physical body, the anatomical body, the neutral, dead body, but the body as lived, the animate body—the *situated* body’ (11, original italics). In Gatens’ account,

there is a contingent, though not arbitrary, relation between the male body and masculinity and the female body and femininity. To claim this is neither biologism nor essentialism but is rather to acknowledge the importance of complex and ubiquitous networks of signification to the historically, psychologically and culturally variable ways of being a man or a woman. To deny these networks and the specificity of historical forms of femininity and masculinity in favour of a conception of the subject as essentially sex-neutral will lead to the reproduction of present relations between the sexes. (13)

Gatens restores specific focus to the female body and deconstructs the mind/body and the transcendence/immanence dualism as she believes that ‘[r]ationality is not a transcendent capacity of a disembodied “mind” but an immanent power of active nature. Neither reason

nor law come to us “from above” but rather develop immanently from our collective situations’ (148).

By insisting on the transcendent capacity of the female body as stated above, postmodern feminist philosophers deconstruct the transcendence/immanence dualism. They do not merely invert the dualism as early feminists did, but they eradicate the dualistic hierarchies between the two terms of the dualism through their conception of “transcendence in immanence” rather than transcendence/immanence.⁹ Transcendence in immanence means that the body, nature, and materiality in general can be as transcendent as the soul and the mind. According to Young, ‘[i]n asking how there can be a world for a subject, Merleau-Ponty reorients the entire tradition of that questioning by locating subjectivity not in mind or consciousness, but in the *body*’ (35, original italics). Young introduces the concept of ‘ambiguous transcendence’, which is a synonym to transcendence in immanence. Ambiguous transcendence means conferring a sense of transcendence on the body. She states:

While feminine bodily existence is a transcendence and openness to the world, it is an *ambiguous transcendence*, a transcendence that is at the same time laden with immanence. Now, once we take the locus of subjectivity and transcendence to be the lived rather than pure consciousness, all transcendence is ambiguous because the body as natural and material is immanence. (36, original italics)

In Young’s account, ‘any lived body exists as a material thing as well as a transcending subject’ (39). She believes that subjectivity—as one of the senses of transcendence especially for Beauvoir—is attained through the body itself not away from it. This leads her to critique Beauvoir’s argument that women’s subjectivity is achieved away from the body. She maintains that ‘[i]n de Beauvoir’s scheme, immanence expresses the movement of life rather than history. Life is necessary and very demanding. Without getting food and shelter and caring for the sick and saving babies from harm there is no possibility for transcendence and history’ (137). I go along with Young in her view that sustaining life, even if it is immanent, is crucial for achieving transcendence. In addition, subjectivity can be achieved in and through the body. It can be achieved by maintaining life at home, not only by engaging in projects outside the home as earlier described by Beauvoir.

⁹Here feminists are influenced by the philosophical insights of German phenomenologist Husserl (1859-1938), especially by his ideas of the lived body and transcendence in immanence. Indeed, phenomenology presents a promising move for feminists with regard to their relation with the body. I think the influence of phenomenologists—especially Heidegger, Husserl, and Merleau-Ponty—on feminists needs thorough examination and further research.

Along the same lines, feminist philosopher Christine Battersby also believes that transcendence for women cannot be achieved away from the body. In her book *The Phenomenal Woman*, Battersby states that she uses the ‘phenomenality’ of women ‘productively’ (11). Influenced by the ontological turn in feminist thought, she insists on a kind of feminism that takes bodily differences and personal experiences into account. She admits that she registers ‘a self that is not a unity, but that functions through personae’ (210). Here Battersby endorses fluidity and the flow of identities in a similar sense to that suggested by Elizabeth Grosz in her *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (1994) and, more importantly, by Luce Irigaray in her *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977). Grosz challenges the fixity of women’s bodies and identities regardless of their specificities. According to Grosz, ‘[t]he body image is as much a function of the subject’s psychology and sociohistorical context as of anatomy. The limits or borders of the body image are not fixed by nature or confined to the anatomical “container,” the skin. The body image is fluid and dynamic’ (179). This echoes Battersby’s meaning when she uses the term ‘personae’ when describing the sense of non-unitary self deployed in her work.

Transcendence in Immanence through Theology:

In their attempt to deconstruct the transcendence/immanence dualism, feminists and ecofeminists turned also to theology for theology has helped to entrench the gendered implications of transcendence/immanence. Although he is mainly a philosopher, Plato implants the idea of relating transcendence and masculinity to the divine when he states that ‘the soul resembles the divine, and the body resembles the mortal’ (*Phaedo* 70). Because all dualisms are related to each other, by extension, the soul became synonymous with transcendence, mind, rationality, culture, masculinity, and the divine; on the other hand, the body became synonymous to immanence, physicality, irrationality, nature, femininity, and the mundane. Feminists began to de-stabilise and redefine the concept of transcendence when they recognised that one of the most powerful senses of transcendence that oppress women and manipulate nature is the relation of transcendence to God. The soul/matter or the transcendence/immanence dualism powerfully generated the God/world dualism in which God is related to all positive features, including maleness, and the world is related to all negative features, including femaleness.

Mary Daly and Luce Irigaray are considered now to be the originating and leading figures in advancing the argument for the need to present a radical challenge to patriarchal institutional religion and the need, therefore, for women’s religion—as will be discussed

below in detail. But it was actually the American feminist sociologist, novelist, and poet Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935) who first gave singular voice to this issue. In her seminal book *His Religion and Hers* (1923), Gilman bravely critiqued religion in terms of two aspects: first, she critiqued the fact that religion is male-constructed and male-oriented; second, she challenged the God/world or religion/life dualism. In Gilman's view, religion has always been on the side of man following 'man's early assumption that he alone was the life-giver' (65). Religion, for Gilman, is 'man-influenced' (130). She believes that men have long kept women out of religion and that women must rise 'from their prison' to be 're-born and re-throned' (97). Gilman's second critique is of the religion/life, God/world, being/doing, or transcendence/immanence dualism. While Robinson's *Gilead* will be seen to offer a dynamic exploration of this dualism, both Morrison and Walker in their writing examine how 'religion [...] has been injured by coming through the minds of [white] men alone' (*His Religion and Hers* 202). Gilman significantly distinguishes between two kinds of religions that she refers to as 'death-based religion' and 'birth-based religion'. According to her, the main question posed in a death-based religion is: 'What is going to happen to me after I am dead?', whereas the main question posed in a birth-based religion is: 'What must be done for the child who is born?' (46). In other words, Gilman believes that religion must not be separated from life. It must concern itself with the transformation of the present life for the better and, consequently, this will lead to a better afterlife. She states: 'If religion had concerned itself with our earthly future, it would have had strong influence' (27-28). This is echoed by the view that Reverend John Ames comes to hold at the end of Robinson's novel *Gilead*. In her choice of a birth-based religion, Gilman rightly challenges the patriarchal degradation of reproduction, materiality, the body, and the domestic sphere. She believes that religion must concern itself with the child, the family, the state, and the world. She argues:

The birth-based religion is necessarily and essentially altruistic, a forgetting of oneself for the good of the child, and tends to develop naturally into love and labor for the widening range of family, state, and world. The first [death-based religion] leads our thoughts away from this world about which we know something, into another world about which we know nothing. The first is something to be *believed*. The second is something to be *done*. (47, my italics)

This leads Gilman to challenge the related dualism between being and doing, or as she says in the above quotation, between believing and doing. Gilman rejects 'the superiority of "being" over "doing" as advocated by many philosophers 'who claim "that it is nobler To Be than To Do"' (98). She postulates that there is no being without doing (98), arguing that

‘[l]ife is action. We should not say “life” as a noun but “living” as an active verb. The process of living is a continuously active one’ (98).

The American radical philosopher and theologian Mary Daly (1928-2010) was the key thinker for second-wave feminism who continued to reiterate the relation of the transcendence of God to the patriarchal scheme of inferiorising women and nature. In her foundational work *The Church and the Second Sex* (1968), Daly critiques patriarchal religion. It is worth mentioning that Daly, as she states in a footnote in the Introduction to her book, uses ‘the word *church* here and elsewhere not only specifically to refer to the Catholic church but also generally to include all churches and other institutionalized manifestations of patriarchal religion’ (XII, original italics). She maintains that religions ‘are infrastructures of the edifice of patriarchy’ (XII-XIII). She summarises her view in her famous apothegm when she postulates: ‘Briefly, if God is male, then the male is God’ (38). According to Daly, ‘[i]n theology, at the root of such distortions as antifeminism is the problem of conceptualizations, images, and attitudes concerning God’ (180). She wants to eradicate theological misogyny by proposing a kind of ‘theological anthropology’ that is not built on a sexual hierarchy (190). In her final chapter, which is entitled ‘*The Second Sex* and the Seeds of Transcendence’ (220), Daly admits that it is Beauvoir who inspired her to write this book. She states how:

The fundamental difference between Simone de Beauvoir’s vision of the Church and the women that motivated this book is the difference between despair and hope [...]. De Beauvoir was willing to accept the conservative vision of the Church as the reality, and therefore has had to reject it as unworthy of mature humanity. However, there is an alternative to rejection, an alternative which need not involve self-mutilation. This is commitment to radical transformation of the negative, life-destroying elements of the Church as it exists today [...]. Such commitment requires hope and courage. (221)

Indeed, towards the end of *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir raises some thought-provoking ideas regarding women’s religion. She states: ‘When a sex or a class is condemned to immanence, it is necessary to offer it the mirage of some form of transcendence. Man enjoys the great advantage of having a God endorse the codes he writes’ (589). She bravely proposes that ‘[t]here must be religion for women; and there must be women, “true women”, to perpetuate religion’ (591). Against this backdrop she bleakly concludes that for woman to become God ‘is to accomplish the impossible synthesis of the *en-soi* and the *pour-soi*’ (599-600, original italics). When Beauvoir wrote these words, she did not know that they would be an inspiration to later generations of feminists and would open the gates for them to deconstruct the transcendence/immanence dualism. Yet, according to Daly, Beauvoir’s main

fault is her despairing proposal about women's religion. Beauvoir is an atheist who 'rejects Christianity as burdensome baggage inherited from the past' (*The Church and the Second Sex* 222). Rather than a theology of despair, Daly opts for a theology of hope that seeks the liberation of women from all metaphysical stereotypes correlating with the transcendence/immanence dualism.

Daly's theology of hope and her insistence on getting rid of the gendered implications of the transcendence/immanence dualism lead her to tackle the issue of transcendence in more detail in her second book *Beyond God the Father* (1973). In this book, Daly stresses the fact that challenging the metaphysical view of transcendence as opposed to immanence is a persistent idea in feminist philosophy and theology. She believes that 'the women's revolution, insofar as it is true to its own essential dynamics, is an ontological, spiritual revolution, pointing beyond the idolatries of sexist society and sparking creative action in and toward transcendence' (6). Daly argues that 'the entire conceptual systems of theology and ethics, developed under the conditions of patriarchy, have been the products of males and 'tend to serve the interests of sexist society' (4). She maintains that '[e]xclusively masculine symbolism for God, for the notion of divine "incarnation" in human nature, and for the human relationship to God reinforces sexual hierarchy' (4). According to Daly,

[t]he symbol of the Father God, spawned in the human imagination and sustained as plausible by patriarchy, has in turn rendered service to this type of society by making its mechanisms for the oppression of women appear right and fitting. If God in "his" heaven is a father ruling "his" people, then it is in the "nature" of things and according to divine plan and the order of the universe that society be male-dominated' (13).

It is undeniable that Daly's thought is foundational for feminist theology; yet, her notion of transcendence, like Beauvoir's, is still inflected with some aspects of the masculinist metaphysical notion of transcendence. Rivera argues that 'Daly's depiction of transcendence (like de Beauvoir's) retained aspects of its prevalent images, namely those of separation and independence' (7). In her book *Sexism and God-Talk* (1983), spiritual ecofeminist Rosemary Radford Ruether agrees with Rivera in critiquing Mary Daly. She believes that even in Daly's attempt to get rid of the masculinist traditions of religion, 'the basic categories of Christian theology continue to operate in unconscious ways' (38). Ruether proposes paganism, Goddess feminism, and spirituality as an alternative to institutional religions. She uses the term 'God/ess' to 'combine both the masculine and feminine forms of the word for the divine' (46). As Ruether states, 'this term is unpronounceable and inadequate'

(46); she uses it as a sign of the divine ‘that would transcend patriarchal limitations and signal redemptive experience for women as well as men’ (46). Like other feminists, she rejects the image of God as monolithic, transcendent and exclusively male. As an ecofeminist, Ruether relates the metaphysical idea of the transcendent male to the control of women and nature. She argues that ‘the underside of this transcendent male ego is the conquest of nature, imaged as the conquest and transcendence of the Mother’ (47). According to her, instead, ‘[w]e can speak of the root human image of the divine as the Primal Matrix, the great womb within which all things, Gods and humans, sky and earth, human and nonhuman beings, are generated’ (48). Ruether believes that in the Goddess, ‘the divine is not “up there” as abstracted ego, but beneath and around us as encompassing source of life and renewal of life; spirit and matter are not split hierarchically’ (49). She succinctly maintains:

Male monotheism reinforces the social hierarchy of patriarchal rule through its religious system [...]. God is modeled after the patriarchal ruling class and is seen as addressing this class of males directly, adopting them as his “sons.” They are his representatives, the responsible partners of the covenant with him. [...]. Patriarchy relates man to God; and woman to man. This generates a series of hierarchies. Women no longer stand in direct relation to God; they are connected to God secondarily, through the male. (53)

Ruether de-genders God in order to free His/Her image from the patriarchal ideology which creates an analogy between the rule of God and the rule of man over woman and claims that men are God’s representatives on earth. Ruether’s idea of the God that has no gender and that exists everywhere around us in the world will be reiterated and explored in a more experiential way in Shug Avery’s conception of God in *The Color Purple*, as will be taken up below.

Luce Irigaray: Transcendent and Divine Women:

Like Mary Daly, the French feminist philosopher, psychoanalyst, linguist, and cultural theorist Luce Irigaray (b. 1930) picked up and developed Beauvoir’s ahead-of-time mode of thinking regarding women’s religion. Irigaray is one of the key and most prominent figures in contributing to the deconstruction of the transcendence/immanence dualism, building on and reacting to Beauvoir’s argument. Her deconstruction of the transcendence/immanence dualism, which by extension deconstructs many other dualisms such as male/female, culture/nature, and God/world, consists of two steps: the first, emphasising sexual difference and restoring the female body; and, the second, proposing a God or a divinity for women.

Irigaray insists, in her influential article ‘Divine Women’, that ‘we must thereby enter further into womanhood, and not become more alien to ourselves than we were, more in exile than we were’ (60). According to her, ‘[f]rom birth I am a woman, not only through my body. I am not only a female but a woman because I belong to a subjective identity, different from those of a man’ (‘Toward a Divine in the Feminine’ 13). In this statement, Irigaray dismantles some of the boundaries that separate the term female from the term woman, or sex from gender in feminist and wider discourse. She argues that a woman should not be regarded as an object on the basis of her body and her biological constitution; on the contrary, it is this very body which marks woman as a subject. Irigaray undoes the basis of the polarisation of men and women as subject and object respectively. They might both be regarded as irreducible subjects. She says: ‘These two subjects are irreducible, the one to the other. They cannot be substituted the one for the other, nor subjected to a hierarchical assessment. They really are two, two who are qualitatively and not quantitatively different’ (‘Toward a Divine in the Feminine’ 14). Irigaray insists that sexual difference is a privilege for women in these terms. It is through the body that woman can assert her identity and subjectivity. In her book *Elemental Passions*, Irigaray states that negating or ignoring sexual difference ‘neutralises’ society (3). She criticises early feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Simone de Beauvoir for their attitude of negating the femininity of women and also addresses sexuality and sexual economy. According to Irigaray,

[i]n order to escape this situation, a certain number of women have decided to become men’s equals. This does not solve the problems of amorous economy between men and women, nor between women for that matter. Identifying with men allows them a sexuality which seems more free and “sporty”, part masculine, part feminine. It does not fulfill them either emotionally or culturally. (*Elemental Passions* 2-3)

Sexual difference, for Irigaray, is ‘the most radical difference and the one most necessary to the life and culture of the human species’ (*Elemental Passions* 3). She adds that woman ‘needs to be situated and valued, to be *she* in relation to her self’ (*Elemental Passions* 3, original italics).

Irigaray elaborates on many of her ideas in the book *Why Different?*—a collection of interviews with her conducted in France and Italy. She argues that affirming sexual difference is a positive way of overcoming otherness. According to her, the problem that some theorists in general and feminists in particular have with asserting sexual difference has nothing to do with difference itself, but with the way difference functions and operates hierarchically. She rightly states that:

Oppression comes from difference that's functioning hierarchically. Difference exists. Difference in race, difference in tradition, difference in class, difference in gender [...]. How can we refuse or deny that? The problem is that difference has always been a means for subordination and slavery. But affirming difference has nothing to do with some kind of racism, on the contrary. (*Why Different* 26)

In Irigaray's view, difference is a form of coexistence rather than otherness. She emphasises 'the horizontal relationship between the sexes or genders, which runs counter to our tradition, on all levels dominated by a vertical relationship whether genealogical or hierarchical' (*Why Different?* 123). She maintains that '[s]exual difference compels us to a radical refounding of dialectic, of ontology, of theology' (*Why Different?* 165), and 'contests the cleavages sensible/intelligible, concrete/abstract, matter/form, living/dead. It also refuses the opposition between being and becoming' (*Why Different?* 159-160). Irigaray praises feminists of embodiment who celebrate sexual difference. For her, ontological philosophers and feminists of embodiment

represent a questioning of what we call intelligible, epistèmè, reason, idea, concept, etc. But they signify one more step in the becoming of human consciousness, liberty, ethics, a stage where ethics is not separated from ontology but remains linked to it as access to the world of another light where the "mystery of the other illuminates" on the path of a new rationality. (*Why Different?* 165-166)

The second step after affirming sexual difference is creating a God for women. It is important to note that, by God, Irigaray means an ideal or a transcendent idea. In her article 'Toward a Divine in the Feminine', Irigaray poses the question of '[h]ow can we find, define, and practice a spiritual doctrine appropriate to women?' (13). She postulates that '[i]f God is the keystone of our tradition, I think the most decisive act of sovereignty is to become aware of all the energy, all the representations invested in him'. (*Why Different?* 173). In her book *Sexes and Genealogies*, a collection of essays written between 1980 and 1986, Irigaray points out that the image of God has long been appropriated by patriarchal society to oppress women, contending that '[r]espect for God is possible as long as no one realizes that he is a mask concealing the fact that men have taken sole possession of the divine, of identity, and of kinship [...]. God is being used by men to oppress women' (v, original italics). For Irigaray, 'God has been created out of man's gender. He scarcely sets limits within Himself and between Himself: He is father, son, spirit. Man has not allowed himself to be defined by another gender: the female' ('Divine Women' 61). Therefore, she calls for women's divinity. In Irigaray's view, '[d]ivinity is what we need to become free, autonomous, sovereign. No

human subjectivity, no human society has ever been established without the help of the divine' ('Divine Women' 62). She argues that '[i]f women have no God, they are unable either to communicate or commune with one another. They need, we need, an infinite if they are to share *a little*' ('Divine Women' 62, original italics). Moreover, she insists that 'as long as woman lacks a divine mode in her image she cannot establish her subjectivity or achieve a goal of her own. She lacks an ideal that would be her goal or path in becoming' ('Divine Women' 63-64). Following Beauvoir's argument, she laments the fact that:

The (male) ideal other has been imposed upon women by men. Man is supposedly woman's more perfect other, her model, her essence. The most human and the most divine goal woman conceive is to become *man*. If she is to become woman, if she is to accomplish her female subjectivity, woman needs a god who is a figure for the perfection of *her* subjectivity. ('Divine Women' 64, original italics)

Irigaray challenges the fact that man is always defined by God, and woman is defined by man, as stated by many androcentric philosophers and theologians such as German philosopher, theologian, and anthropologist Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872). In his groundbreaking book *The Essence of Christianity* (1841), Feuerbach states that 'God is the mirror of man' (63). According to Irigaray,

[t]he only diabolical thing about women is their lack of a God and the fact that, deprived of God, they are forced to comply with models that do not match them, that exile, double, mask them, cut them off from themselves and from one another, stripping away their ability to move forward into love, art, thought, toward their ideal and divine fulfillment. ('Divine Women' 64)

Irigaray explicitly deconstructs the transcendence/immanence dualism when she states: 'I also believe the religious objective would have to change from "a cult" of adoration—idoltrist, blind?—for a God generally designated in the masculine, an all powerful and corporeally absent God, towards the spiritualization of our living bodies, especially in the way we love nature, ourselves, our fellow humans and the other half of the human genus' (*Why Different?* 57-58). She explains:

We've generally located transcendence between the "sky" and us. We should learn to lay it between us. Each one of us is inaccessible to the other, transcendent to him/her [...]. It is no longer acceptable that philosophy, politics, and religion be based on the model of the One, of the identical to oneself, which only tolerates a few hierarchized differences in relation to the One. (*Why Different?* 58-59)

In Irigaray's line of thought, women can achieve their divinity and transcendence through their body; they have to love their body and regard it as a subject and an identity in itself.

This is exactly what is meant by transcendence in immanence. She maintains that ‘women have rarely used their beauty as a weapon *for themselves*, even more rarely as a *spiritual* weapon. The body’s splendor has rarely been used as a lever to advance self-love, self-fulfillment’ (‘Divine Women’ 64, original italics). Irigaray adds, ‘[w]oman has no mirror wherewith to become woman. Having a God and becoming one’s gender go hand in hand. God is the other that we absolutely cannot be without’ (‘Divine Women’ 67). In Irigaray’s account, ‘[i]f we are to escape slavery it is not enough to destroy the master. Only the divine offers us freedom—enjoins it upon us’ (‘Divine Women’ 68). She advances, ‘[i]f there is ever to be a consciousness of self in the female camp, each woman will have to situate herself freely in relation to herself, not just in relation to the community, the couple, the family’ (‘Divine Women’ 69). She believes that ‘[i]t is essential that we be God *for ourselves* so that we can be divine for the other, not idols, fetishes, symbols that have already been outlined or determined’ (‘Divine Women’ 71, original italics).

Irigaray’s thought regarding the assertion of sexual difference and achieving transcendence through immanence has influenced a wide array of postmodern feminists. Braidotti’s position is aligned to Irigaray’s. She believes that ‘[b]y advocating a feminine form of transcendence through “radical immanence”, Irigaray postulates a definition of the body not only as material, but also as the threshold to a generalized notion of female being, a new feminist humanity’ (59). She adds that ‘[t]he issue of the sensible transcendental is crucial to this project. It situates the female embodied subject in a space between transcendence and immanence’ (59). According to Braidotti, ‘[c]onsciousness needs to be redefined accordingly in terms of flows of variations, constantly transforming within patterns of continuity. The old mind-body liaison needs to be reconstructed in terms which are not nationally driven, top-down and hierarchical. Processes, flows, in-between-status have to be taken into serious account, that is, into conceptual representation’ (63).

Pamela Sue Anderson also follows Irigaray in her article ‘Transcendence and Feminist Philosophy’. She admits: ‘Irigaray and I might agree that transcendence should become the critical focus for both feminist philosophers and theologians’ (28). Anderson points out that ‘[g]enerally, in Western philosophy and myth, transcendence has not been associated with the female bodily life. Instead, transcendence has been attributed to male subjects who seek the divine by devaluing and/or thinking beyond the body’ (29). She argues that:

No reversal of the hierarchy of gendered imagery from masculine to feminine would achieve mutual recognition as the ground for goodness in our discursive and bodily

practices. A feminist reversal of the hierarchical ordering of theological concepts according to their gender would also fail to discover how women and men can cultivate practical reasoning in mutually constructive, social, and material relations. (30)

In her *Immanent Transcendence*, Patrice Haynes points out that Irigaray's philosophy presents fruitful resources for feminists reconceptualising transcendence.¹⁰ According to Haynes,

Like a number of feminist thinkers, in particular feminist theologians, Irigaray is critical of the theistic depiction of divine transcendence as Wholly Other than the material world—a self-sufficient, eternal power upheld as the transcendent source of truth, goodness and beauty. [...] For feminists like Irigaray, the problem with the theistic account of God is that it licenses the “sacrificial logics” that drives patriarchy's repudiation and appropriation of the maternal-material, the essential (yet disavowed) condition of all life. (*Immanent Transcendence* 88)

As Haynes maintains, the ‘sensible transcendental’ is invoked by Irigaray to enable her ‘to rethink the classic dichotomies of western philosophy—intelligible/sensible; form/matter; and transcendent/immanent—in non-hierarchical, non-oppositional ways’ (*Immanent Transcendence* 92-93). Influenced by Irigaray's philosophy, Haynes critiques the metaphysical theological view and valorization of transcendence. She points out in *Immanent Transcendence* that ‘[i]n the western tradition, the otherworldly God of theism has tended to monopolize the concept of transcendence’ (15), whereas immanence is ontologically dependent due to ‘its inertia and passivity or to its waywardness and corruptibility’ (17). According to Haynes,

[a] number of feminists also target transcendence on ethical and political grounds; *the concept is charged with serving to cement the entire patriarchal edifice*. Feminist theorizing points out that the transcendence/immanence distinction prevailing in western thought is not just hierarchically ordered but construed in *gendered* terms. (2, my italics)

Moreover, in her article ‘Transcendence, Materialism, and the Reenchantment of Nature’, Haynes argues that:

In feminist theology and feminist philosophy of religion, this distrust of transcendence is specifically directed at that most archetypal figure of transcendence: divine

¹⁰ For full account of how Irigaray helped feminists reshape their relationship with transcendence and immanence, see Patrice Haynes PhD thesis ‘Transcendence Matters: Rethinking Transcendence, Materialism and the Divine in Philosophical Context’, Liverpool, 2005; and also her later book *Immanent Transcendence: Reconfiguring Materialism in Continental Philosophy*, 2012.

transcendence. The transcendent God of monotheism presents serious worries to feminists. As radically other—the transcendent source of all goodness and perfections—God stands in complete contradistinction to the world. As such, the argument runs, *God's relation to the world serves as the model for the dualistic and hierarchical ordering of reality: God-world, spirit-matter, transcendence-immanence, human-nature, and so on.* (56, my italics)

Indeed, relating God to transcendence proved to be an effective tool in the hands of men to claim their superiority over women and nature. In her book *She Who Is*, Elizabeth Johnson also confirms that the image of God serves a key function for patriarchal society:

While officially it is rightly and consistently said that God is spirit and so beyond identification with either male or female sex, yet the daily language of preaching, worship, catechesis, and instruction conveys a different message: God is male, or at least more like a man than a woman, or at least more fittingly addressed as male than as female. *The symbol of God functions.* Upon examination it becomes clear that this exclusive speech about God serves in manifold ways to support an imaginative and structural world that excludes or subordinates women. Wittingly or not, it undermines women's human dignity as equally created in the image of God. (4-5, my italics)

Johnson uses the refrain 'the symbol of God functions' frequently throughout her book in order to stress that God in patriarchal thought is used as a symbol or as a mirror that reflects all good qualities of men. It is important to note that such feminists critique the image or the symbol of God, as appropriated by men, rather than His existence. Johnson is of the view that '[t]he symbol of God does not passively float in the air but functions in social and personal life to sustain or critique certain structures, values, and ways of acting' (36). According to her, '[f]eminist theological analysis makes clear that exclusive, literal, patriarchal speech about God has a twofold negative effect. It fails both human beings and divine mystery. In stereotyping and then banning female reality as suitable metaphor for God, such speech justifies the dominance of men while denigrating the human dignity of women' (36). She adds: 'The patriarchal symbol of the divine sculpts men into the role of God, fully in "his" image and capable of representing "him", while women, thought to be only deficiently in the image of God and ultimately a symbol of evil, play the role of dependent and sinful humanity' (37). The patriarchal scheme runs as follows: if there is a Patriarch in heaven, then there must be a male at the top of the hierarchical order on earth in order to function in God's name and represent Him. As Johnson summarises it, 'male is to female as transcendence is to immanence' (51).

In the same vein, in her book *The Touch of Transcendence*, Mayra Rivera explains that feminists—especially feminist theologians—are aware of the power relations implied in the transcendence/immanence dualism when transcendence refers to God and immanence refers to the world. She contends:

Feminist theologians have long noted the intersections between the conceptions of power as controlling and distant [...] and images of divine transcendence. They have further noted that these ideas of transcendent power are based on a cosmic dualism that produces a variety of binaries, thus shaping our ideas about power, materiality, and human differences, particularly those pertaining to gender. (6)

For Rivera, '[t]he association of transcendence with separation and independence mirrors the ideals of a masculinist culture that envisions the becoming of subjectivity as overcoming the constraints of materiality (and the body)' (7). She expounds how the transcendence/immanence or God/world dualism entails a view that subordinates women and nature to men:

Just as traditional notions of transcendence open a rift between the created realm and God, that rift travels through the created realm opening a metaphysical gap between, on the one hand, transcendence/ immateriality/ progress/ intelligibility/ independence/ Man/ God, and, on the other, immanence/ materiality/ stagnation/ sensibility/ dependence/ Woman/ Nature. (6)

Moreover, Rivera critiques the most common views of transcendence as 'that which is beyond normal physical experience, apart, above, unlimited by materiality' (1). She maintains that divine transcendence was believed to indicate 'God's aloftness, separation, independence, and immateriality—in short, his super/iority. These associations are indeed the most common for the term "transcendence" and the reason it has acquired the reputation of being a tool of patriarchal and imperial self-legitimation' (1). Just as Patrice Haynes calls the interconnected relationship between transcendence and immanence 'immanent transcendence', as the title of her book suggests, Rivera calls it 'relational transcendence'. She defines it as 'a vision of transcendence within creation and between creatures' (2). She contends that '[i]n order to liberate the potential of the notion of transcendence for reconceiving interhuman relations, we must resist its pervasive associations with otherworldliness. It is crucial to bring transcendence in contact with the concrete realities of our world' (2). The phrase 'Touch of Transcendence' in the title of the book is highly suggestive of Rivera's view of breaking down the boundaries between transcendence and immanence. The phrase may seem oxymoronic for some thinkers who still adhere to

traditional metaphysical thinking which situates transcendence in opposition to anything sensible or anything touchable. Yet, this statement is chosen by Rivera as the title of the book in order ‘to highlight the intimacy—a transcendence in the flesh of others whom we touch, but may never fully grasp’ (2). According to her, ‘[a] view of transcendence as independence or separation from matter and flesh depends upon consigning embodiment to a lower realm, which in turn leads to the subordination of women’ (7).

On a similar note, Nancy Frankenberry states in her article ‘Feminist Approaches’ that ‘the Word of God is the word of man, used to keep women in subjection and to hinder their emancipation’ (4). She believes that ‘[l]ong a linchpin holding up other structures of patriarchal rule, the concept of a male God has been judged by every major feminist thinker [...] to be both humanely oppressive and, on the part of believers, religiously idolatrous’ (7). According to Frankenberry, most of the ‘hierarchical oppositions are typically gender-coded’ (9). As a feminist theologian, Frankenberry is mainly concerned with deconstructing the God/world dualism, which is generated by the transcendence/immanence dualism. She too argues that feminists must reconceptualise transcendence as radically immanent. She suggests that ‘contemporary women’s articulation of a relation between God and the world depicts the divine as continuous with the world rather than as radically transcendent ontologically or metaphysically. Divine transcendence is seen to consist in total immanence’ (11).

In addition, in her article ‘Intimations of Transcendence’, feminist theologian Sallie McFague believes that ‘the glory of God’ is ‘in the earth, in the flesh, in the ordinary, in the daily round’ (160). She argues that:

We meet God in and through the world, if we are ever to meet God. God is not out there or back there or yet to be, but hidden in the most ordinary things of our ordinary lives. If we cannot find the transcendent in the world, in its beauty and its suffering, then for us bodily, earthly creatures it is probably not to be found at all. Finding transcendence in and through the earth means paying attention to others. (160)

As McFague’s ideas regarding the immanence of God in all creation are informed by her re-definition of Christian theology, they will prove very similar to Marilynne Robinson’s conception of God in her *Gilead* and *Lila*. According to McFague, ‘[a]n incarnational, immanent theology gives us permission to love the body of the world, and through the world’s beauty to find intimations of God’ (161). She maintains that ‘[t]he body of God is all of creation, all of nature, all that “is,” all that exists. To imagine the world this way—as being in and of God—and to imagine God this way—as being the matrix of all that is—means that the sharp lines between the world and God are erased’ (161). McFague states: ‘I feel as if I

live within the divine milieu and can worship God in the intricacies, specialness, and particularity of each thing' (165).¹¹

¹¹ Similarly, in her book *Theology and Feminism*, feminist theologian Daphne Hampson also puts forward the view that the image of God is male-biased and that the transcendence/immanence or god/world dualism is a patriarchal ideology. She points out that 'the challenge of feminism is not simply that women wish to gain an equal place with men in what is essentially a religion which is biased against them. The challenge of feminism is that women may want to express their understanding of God within a different thought structure' (4). She adds, '[i]t is important for feminists (and others who would reconceive the notion of God) to come to see how far the conceptualization of God in the major tradition as we have known it has been the product of patriarchy' (149). She critiques the patriarchal conceptualisation of God's monotheism and His transcendence above humankind. In line with the view being developed in this thesis is Hampson's assertion that 'what interests me here is not monotheism per se [...], but the particular connotations which have been given to the monotheistic conception of God' (151). Indeed, it is not monotheism that is dangerous, but the dualisms and hierarchies that it fosters and engenders. Influenced by Irigaray's critique of the metaphysical idea of man as the image of God and woman as the image of man and the world, Hampson maintains that "'man" may be held to represent God in relation to humanity, while "woman" is conceived to represent humankind in relation to God. It may then well be that monotheism tends to reinforce hierarchy, for it creates a chain of command' (152-153). She challenges the view that 'human beings are conceived in relationship to God as one pole in a di-polar construal of reality' (152). Feminist theologian and philosopher Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza also approaches the issue of transcendence and immanence in her article 'G*d—The Many-Named', 'not as a philosopher but as a feminist theologian' (109). Fiorenza argues that: 'We have become more and more conscious that all discourses about the transcendent or the Divine—including those of the Bible—are socially conditioned and politically interested. Feminist, black power, indigenous peoples or postcolonial movements have radically questioned those white elite *malestream* theological discourses that have spoken about the transcendent as He, or named G*d in the interest of the powerful' (110, my italics).

In Fiorenza's account, '[a] critical investigation of the G*d-discourses of the Bible, history and theology is important not just for religious reasons. Rather, as "*master narratives*" of western cultures, they are always already implicated in and in collusion with the production and maintenance of systems of knowledge and belief' (114, my italics). According to Fiorenza, the discourses of God as transcendent are a means to subordinate women and the world.

In her article 'Transcendence and Immanence', Claire Colebrook also argues that '[t]he turn to immanence, or the liberation of potentiality and becoming from anything other than itself, would appear to be compatible with, and perhaps necessary for, a feminist politics' (84-85). Like most feminists and ecofeminists, Colebrook, however, rejects the mind/body dualism, even in its inverted forms, and is entangled with the transcendence/immanence dualism, regarding 'the body as the vehicle or site for the mind' (88). Theologian Morny Joy also believes that 'women have been denied right of entry to the superior destiny that is associated with transcendence' (99). Following Irigaray's line of thought, Joy envisions transcendence as 'irreducibility' rather than otherness (117). According to Joy, Irigaray 'establishes the basis for a constructive argument that can challenge the subject/object dichotomy, as well as the dualism of body and spirit—both models that are predominantly associated with the inferiority of women and their flesh. It is by effecting this momentous change in attitudes towards women—where body is no longer deemed sinful, and women no longer can be excluded as profane—that Irigaray's work has made its finest contribution' (120).

Furthermore, Beverly Metcalfe believes that the shift from epistemology to ontology in feminist thought can offer a way out of the transcendence/immanence dualism. She seeks a 'state of transcendence beyond dominant masculinist knowledge, allowing all human beings to take their place as embodied living subjects in their own right, and without recourse to dualistic constructions of sex/gender' (127). She argues that '[f]eminist theological inquiry has revealed the way many religions have been shaped and formulated by masculinist interpretations and ensured male dominance in the prevailing social organization' (130). According to Metcalfe, '[b]y reconfiguring the human and divine as both immanent and transcendent, Irigaray has collapsed the distance between the human and the divine' (144). Following Irigaray's argument, she concludes that women 'do not have to comply with "masculinist models," or reside unnoticed behind the "masculine mask"; rather, the unveiling of the feminine is a signature of that which is holy and divine, embracing rejuvenating and cosmic processes' (145). To use Metcalfe's words, feminists should not 'replace a male-centred lens with a female-centred lens' (145). She believes that 'the patriarchal construction of female otherness need not be reversed into sameness but into a positive celebration of otherness as a mark of holiness' (147).

Interestingly enough, it is not only female theologians who are attempting to deconstruct the transcendence/immanence dualism; male theologians are also concerned with the same issue but in a more general vein. In his article ‘Materialism and Transcendence’, theologian John Milbank believes that transcendence is never at odds with immanence; on the other hand, transcendence, for him, is ‘at home’ with immanence. He states that ‘the theological appeal to transcendence alone sustains a non-reductive materiality and is the very reverse of any notion of idealism. In fact, idealism is always most *at home* within immanence’ (396-397, my italics).

Thus, recent and postmodern feminists have deconstructed the metaphysically-burdened transcendence/immanence dualism by reconceptualising the concepts of transcendence and immanence. Immanence is no longer the debased realm of nature, the body, and materiality. Indeed, according to this ‘materialist’ turn, it is through immanence that women can achieve transcendence. Feminists invoked theology and philosophy in order to achieve a non-dualistic relationship between transcendence and immanence, benefiting from Derrida’s deconstruction. In their works, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Marilynne Robinson are good representatives of how feminist writers deconstruct the transcendence/immanence dualism in literature. The question that comes to mind here is: Do these feminist writers who come from different cultural backgrounds deconstruct the transcendence/immanence dualism in the same way and for the same purpose? This will be examined in the rest of this chapter.

Literary Explorations of the Deconstruction of the Transcendence/Immanence Dualism in the Works of Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, and Marilynne Robinson:

How and why do Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and Marilynne Robinson—as representatives of black and white American ecofeminism—deconstruct the transcendence/immanence dualism in their fiction? Can literary works bring new understanding through their engagement with the issue? Since the three selected writers are not only novelists, but also essayists, theorists, and social and political activists, how does their non-fiction contribute to related debates? In each case the fiction is not a passive reflection of the conceptualisations discussed in the theoretical section above; it is rather a mode for exploring ideas and thus entering into an active and dynamic exchange with theory, a form of theorising and philosophising in itself. With regard to the deconstruction of the

transcendence/immanence dualism, I will analyse novels by Walker, Morrison, and Robinson that tackle it in their examinations of American society and history, beginning with Walker's *Meridian*, *The Color Purple*, and *The Temple of My Familiar* and moving on to Morrison's *Paradise*, and then Robinson's *Gilead*.

As discussed in the first section of the chapter, in particular, theology provides a rich field for feminists and ecofeminists to question the transcendence/immanence dualism and to challenge the patriarchal connotations assigned to transcendence and immanence. In their fiction, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Marilynne Robinson address theological questions, attempting to redefine Christianity from a spiritual ecofeminist perspective and move away from the patriarchal and imperialist discourses implied within it.

Deconstructing the Transcendence/Immanence Dualism in Alice Walker's *Meridian*, *The Color Purple* and *The Temple of My Familiar*:

Alice Walker is one of the earliest ecofeminists to reject Christianity as an institutional religion and to adopt a more liberating, explicitly spiritual, attitude towards religion in general and Christianity in particular. It is important to note that rejecting Christianity as an institutionalised religion does not mean rejecting Christianity per se. In her book *To Live Fully Here and Now*, Karla Simcikova discusses Walker as a spiritual thinker and writer. She proposes that spirituality is a further and more mature phase of Walker's thinking (10). According to Simcikova,

while Walker posits an earth-based religion against Christianity, the mainstream religion in America, she also locates it *within* that tradition, since this *is* her religious base; she was raised in the Christian faith as a Methodist. Thus, unlike that of the indigenous peoples, whose spirituality grows uniquely from their own traditions, Walker's spiritual development entails blending new spiritual impetuses within Christianity, resulting in a sort of "spiritual hybridity". (19, original italics)

Indeed, it can be argued that Walker is a spiritual ecofeminist par excellence. Not only does she convey the tenets of spiritual ecofeminism in her works, she self-consciously takes the label of spiritual ecofeminist upon herself—or, more accurately in her own terms, an ecowomanist. Walker elaborates on her ecowomanist stance in her theoretical work *The Same River Twice*. She states that '[o]ne of the most painful things for me to accept has been my mother's fundamentalist Christian prejudice against many of the people and things I love. She was devoutly religious all her life, and assumed, I think, that she learned her best qualities from the Bible, and from church. I disagree with that assumption' (167). Walker believes that

her mother was ‘led astray by religion’ (*The Same River Twice* 169). She explicitly deconstructs the transcendence/immanence dualism when she argues that her spirituality stems from and is placed on the earth. According to Walker, God is not up there aloof in heaven, rather he is immanent on earth. She states that ‘[c]ertainly I do not believe there is a God beyond nature. The world is God. Man is God. So is a leaf or a snake’ (*In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens* 265). She maintains:

It is my habit as a born-again pagan to lie on the earth in worship. In this, I imagine I am like my pagan African and Native American ancestors, who were sustained by their conscious inseparability from Nature prior to being forced by missionaries to focus all their attention on a God “up there” in “heaven”. (*The Same River Twice* 25)

Walker describes herself as ‘pagan’. Importantly for my argument about the relationship between ecofeminism and theology, it is the very definition of the word ‘pagan’ that is used as a vehicle here to bring ecofeminism closer to theology. Walker defines pagans as ‘people whose primary spiritual relationship is with Nature and the earth; people who have traditionally been oppressed or destroyed by patriarchal religions’ (*The Same River Twice* 42). In *Anything We Love Can Be Saved* she adds: “‘Pagan’, means of the land, country dweller, peasant,” all of which my family was. It also means a person whose primary spiritual relationship is with Nature and the Earth’ (17). Simcikova argues that the essence of Walker’s belief is that ‘to experience the *whole* self one must reunite and realize the full capacity of both the physical body and the spirit, which are, in reality, inseparable’ (27-28, original italics). To reach this state of wholeness, all boundaries between transcendence and immanence must be surpassed. In Walker’s view, the state of wholeness is one of the things that has historically distinguished black women from white women and this leads her to articulate her womanist theory.

In their attempts to challenge the white middle-class norm of Western feminism, black feminist theorists, such as Angela Davis, bell hooks, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker, not only challenged many of the issues discussed in mainstream feminism, they also contended with feminism’s terminology as well. This led Walker to use the term ‘womanism’ instead of ‘feminism’—in her groundbreaking work *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983)—in order to capture the differences of experience that can exist between white and black American women. In fact, Walker, like many other black American feminists, felt that mainstream white feminism had failed to represent her and did not address black women’s specific experiences and problems. So, womanism appeared with the premise that ‘only a black can

‘speak for a black’ (Wilson-Tagoe 126). Kimberly Springer points out that ‘Black women enacted feminist politics that acknowledged the ways that they were oppressed as Blacks *and* women’ (1062, original italics). In his ‘Preface’ to *Alice Walker: Critical Perspectives*, Henry Louis Gates contends that Walker designates womanism as a ‘sensitivity [...] that seeks to transcend the failings she decries in some mainstream feminisms’ (x). In her Preface to *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*, Walker defines a womanist as:

A woman [...] committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally universalist, as in: “Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige, and black?” Ans.: “Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented [...]. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the folk. Loves herself. *Regardless*. (xi-xii, original italics)

Walker’s womanist ethics of wholeness and roundness is evident in the above quotation. A womanist is a woman who accommodates and tolerates differences between people. She is ‘not a separatist’ in the sense that she does not distinguish between people on the bases of gender, race, or class. She loves women and men, whites and blacks, and poor and rich people equally. As for Walker’s idea of ‘wholeness’, a whole person for Walker is someone who transcends all forms of prejudice and reaches a state of tolerance with him/herself and with others. It is when s/he reaches this state of wholeness that s/he becomes a full human being. According to Walker, ‘full humanity’ is ‘a state of oneness with all things, and a willingness to die (or to live) so that the best that has been produced can continue to live in someone else’ (*In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens* 265). In addition, for Walker, a womanist seeks to satisfy ‘the body and the spirit simultaneously’ (*Anything We Love Can Be Saved* 50). This simultaneous satisfaction of body and spirit is one aspect of how Walker deconstructs the transcendence/immanence dualism.

In *Anything We Love Can Be Saved*, Walker states: ‘My activism—cultural, political, spiritual—is rooted in my love of nature and my delight in human beings. It is when people are at peace, content, *full*, that they are most likely to meet my expectation’ (xx, original italics). Here Walker explicitly breaks down the boundaries between religion and life, religion and politics, spirituality and activism, and transcendence and immanence. In Walker’s view, there is no contradiction at all between being spiritual (or religious in the strict sense) and being political as was claimed by patriarchal and imperialist discourses. Patriarchy claims that in order for women to be religious, they must obey the orders of men

(representing God's law) without questioning. Similarly, imperialist and colonial discourses—especially during slavery—claim that slaves must be passive and depoliticised or accepting in order to gain Heaven in the other world. White oppressors have sought to implant in the minds of black people that they must suffer in their earthly lives—rather than seek change—in order to be rewarded in the other world. In his 'Black Theology in American Religion', James H. Cone contends that 'Black religious thought is not identical with the Christian theology of white Americans. Nor is it identical with traditional African beliefs, past or present. It is both—but reinterpreted for and adapted to the life-situation of black people's struggle for justice in a nation whose social, political, and economic structures are dominated by a white racist ideology' (6-7).¹²

Walker tackles all these ideas and more in her literary works, especially *Meridian* (1976), *The Color Purple* (1982), and *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989). In these novels, she explicitly deconstructs the transcendence/immanence dualism that was created by patriarchy and also operates in the service of imperialism. Walker's second novel, *Meridian*, is set in the US in the 1960s and 1970s. It recounts the story of Meridian Hill, a young black woman who is an active participant in the Civil Rights Movement. The novel is understood by critics as addressing both political and spiritual issues. According to Marge Piercy, in *Meridian*, Walker 'deals with the issues of tactics and strategy in the civil rights movement, with the nature of commitment, the possibility of interracial love and communication, the vital and lethal strands in American and black experience, with violence and non-violence and self-hatred' (9). Meridian commits all her life to political struggle and community work in the small black towns of the South. Significantly for my argument on the deconstruction of transcendence/immanence dualism, Walker focuses in this novel on the journey of Meridian to gain spiritual wholeness through political and social activism.

Through the character of Meridian, Walker registers her rejection of the patriarchal and imperialist white church for Meridian is presented to lose faith in the white church since she was thirteen. The narrator reflects that: 'Whenever she was in a church, she felt claustrophobic, as if the walls were closing in' (217). This is because it propagated for what she comes to see as '[a] life of withdrawal from the world, a life of constant awareness of death' (*Meridian* 16). This emphasis has the effect of damping down political resistance by

¹² For a detailed account of how white churches used Christianity to oppress black people, see the book by Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.—Baptist pastor and an American politician: *Marching Blacks: An Interpretive History of the Rise of the Black Common Man* (1945), in which he 'accused white churches of turning Christianity into "churchianity," thereby distorting the essential message of the Gospel which is "equality" and "brotherhood."' (Cone 10).

encouraging black followers to focus on salvation and to think of death as their only comfort, and it is at odds with the revolutionary character of Meridian. This causes her to be in constant clashes with her mother. Meridian's mother—like Walker's mother herself and representative of the older generation who were more seriously affected by slavery—is depicted as a narrowly religious woman. She believes that Meridian is an atheist when she refuses to go to the church every Sunday with her for the narrator informs the reader that for thirty years, Meridian's mother never missed a Sunday sermon although she did not understand most of them. She was 'convinced that this man—whoever was preaching at the time—was instilling in her the wisdom of God, when, in fact, every other sentence was incomprehensible' (75). Mrs Hill

did not complain against the church because she believed the church building—the mortar and bricks—to be holy; she believed that this holiness had rubbed off from years of scripture reading and impassioned prayers, so that now holiness covered the walls like paint. She thought the church was literally God's house, and believed she felt his presence there when she entered the door; when she stepped back outside there was a different feeling, she believed. (74)

Here Walker criticises the narrow understanding of religion and of God. Mrs Hill believes that she can feel and find God only in the church, although there are many wrong things done in the church, not least that the preacher's words are incomprehensible to common people (74).

Moreover, Mrs Hill does not like her daughter's involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. She says to Meridian:

As far as I'm concerned, [...] you have wasted a year of your life, fooling around with those people. The papers say they're crazy. God separated the sheeps from the goats and the black folks from the white. And me from anybody that acts as foolish as they do. It never bothered *me* to sit in the back of the bus, you get just as good view and you don't have all those nasty white asses passing you. (83, original italics)

Mrs Hill's words are a clear reflection of wider Southern society and the imperialist discourse of the white church and its influence on black people. She is utterly convinced that it is God who separates the whites from the blacks and that challenging this social hierarchy displeases God. Meridian's mother is fully depoliticised. Although she has been a teacher, she is not concerned about politics, she has never voted, she even disapproves of the Civil Rights Movement. Almost all the older generation relate God's will to their acceptance of social order and the separation of political from spiritual belief. When Meridian and Lynne are

trying to convince Mrs Turner, an old woman in Atlanta, to participate in voting, she tells them: 'I don't believe in votin'. The good lord He take care of most of my problems. You know he heal the sick and race the dead. Comfort the uncomfortable and blesses the meek' (102). Lynne argues with her: "'So God fixes the road in front of your house, does he?'" (102). The old woman's answer is to accuse Lynne of blasphemy: "'You sounds just like a blasphemmer to me'" (103). Mrs Turner's words reveal another oppressive aspect of the church. The white-led religion has convinced black people that there is no need at all for them to try to take action to solve their problems because God is already there to help them. The older generation are brainwashed to believe in something very naïve like the *deus ex machina* technique used at the end of Greek plays, meaning 'God from the machine,' in which God descends on stage at the end of the play to solve all the complications. This is a ready-made solution that prevents people from taking action.

Just as Mrs Hill and Mrs Turner represent the older generation's narrow understanding of God and religion, Meridian and her Civil Rights co-workers Lynne Rabinowitz, Anne-Marion, and Delores Jones represent the new generation's understanding of religion as not in a dualistic relation to life. Like Meridian, 'Anne-Marion was entirely unsympathetic to daily chapel, notoriously unresponsive to preachers' (26). Mrs Hill says to Meridian and Delores: "'A lot of you young people have lost your respect for the church. Do you even believe in God?'" (88). She narrowly equates God to the church; but Meridian and her friends are highly aware that God can be found anywhere other than the church. Delores says to Meridian: "'No matter what your mother says [...], just remember she spends all her time making prayer pillows'" (85). Delores means that Mrs Hill has a very shallow understanding of religion to the extent that she thinks that God does not accept people's prayers unless they use prayer pillows. Meridian thinks of her mother 'as Black Motherhood personified' (96). She condemns that fact that her mother has spent most her life in church, 'praying for her daughter's soul, and yet, having no concern, no understanding of her daughter's *life* whatsoever' (96, original italics). Walker is portraying beliefs through everyday and habitual embodied practices in order to deconstruct the transcendence/immanence dualism. In patriarchal and imperialist discourses, the soul is assumed to be transcendent and elevated; "real life" as lived through the body is assumed to be immanent and therefore inferior. Mrs Hill has spent her life thinking about how her daughter—whom she regards as faithless and atheist—will be saved in the other world and she has never bothered herself to know or support her daughter's present life. For Walker, therefore, soul and body must be reconciled.

Another good example in the novel in which Walker makes it clear that spirituality and faith are more liberating and accommodating than formal religion, and that transcendence and immanence are never dualistic, can be detected in her depiction of the character of Feather Mae. Feather Mae is Meridian's father's grandmother. She was one of the early black people to liberate themselves from the confines of the white church when she 'renounced all religion that was not based on the experience of physical ecstasy—thereby shocking her Baptist church and its unsympathetic congregation' (51-52). One day, Feather Mae became conscious of both her body and spirit: 'She felt as if she had *stepped into another world*, into a different kind of air [...]. She knew she had fainted but she felt neither weakened nor ill. She felt *renewed*, as from some strange *spiritual intoxication*' (51, my italics). Later, 'near the end of her life she loved walking nude about her yard and worshipped only the sun' (52). This state of spiritual renewal cannot be achieved without breaking down the boundaries between spirit and body because it is suggested that it is through physical ecstasy that one becomes 'whole'. (This idea of achieving spiritual wholeness through physical ecstasy echoes the idea expressed in the excerpt from Margaret Atwood at the very beginning of the chapter where the old woman realises that she can never transcend her body and that it is only through this very body that she can be spiritually whole.)

The story of Feather Mae exerts a great influence on Meridian. At the beginning of the novel, 'Meridian felt as if her body [...] stood in the way of a reconciliation between her mother and that part of her own soul her mother could, perhaps, love. She valued her body less, attended to it less, because she hated its obstruction' (96-97). She has come to feel that her body is an obstacle in the way of achieving spiritual wholeness. This is why she has not taken care of it and so falls prey to illness. Yet, at the end of the novel, especially after she has grasped the story of her great grandmother Feather Mae and understands how she has achieved spirituality through physical ecstasy, Meridian begins to take care of her body and returns 'to the world cleansed of sickness' (241). Walker shows us a new dimension develop in Meridian's character, one that is 'new, sure and ready, even eager, for the world' (241).

Towards the end of the novel, after the peak of the Civil Rights Struggle, not only does Meridian Hill undergo a spiritual renewal, but there is a wider change in the relation to religion among black people. Walker represents a broader understanding that transcendence and immanence, or religion and life, are not contradictory or separate at all; rather they are complementary to each other. This is shown by a difference in church itself. Attending a church after a long absence, Meridian notes, 'the church was not like the ones of her childhood; it was not shabby or small' (211). It is significant for Meridian when the minister

says ‘he would not pray any longer because there was a lot of work for the community to do’ (213). In addition, ‘[s]he was suddenly aware that the sound of the “ahmens” was different. Not muttered in resignation, not shouted in despair. No one bounced in his seat. No one even perspired. Just the “ah-mens” rose clearly, unsentimentally, and with a firm tone of “We are fed up”’ (215). The black congregation are finally shown to understand that fighting for their rights is not against the will of God. Rather, it is when they get their rights that God becomes pleased. Significantly, in this church, ‘[i]nstead of the traditional pale Christ with stray lamb there was a tall, broad-shouldered black man’ (218). This symbolises Walker’s re-envisioning of a Christianity that fits the needs of black people. This black church became ‘after all, the only place left for black people to *congregate*, where the problems of life were not discussed fraudulently and the approach to the future was considered *communally*, and moral questions were taken seriously’ (my italics, 218). When the congregation go to the church, ‘Meridian knew they did not mean simply “church,” as in Baptist, Methodist or whatnot, but rather *communal spirit*, togetherness, righteous convergence’ (my italics, 219). Indeed, it is this ‘communal spirit’ outside the confines of denominational and organised religion that Walker explores in *The Color Purple* and *The Temple of My Familiar*.

The Color Purple is Walker’s third novel, a Pulitzer Prize winner, and can be regarded as the literary embodiment of almost all the characteristics of Walker’s womanist stance. It is written in the mode of the epistolary as it is composed of a series of almost ninety letters from protagonist Celie to God, from Celie to her sister Nettie, and from Nettie to Celie. Set in the American rural South and spans four decades in the lives of Celie and Nettie, it tells the story of the poor black girl Celie and how she gradually transforms from being a passive, voiceless black girl into an active and brave woman who owns her freedom, her sexuality, and her own business. Donnelly points out that ‘throughout her career, Walker’s main concern has been the representation of black women, seeking to give voice to the voiceless, to those who suffer the double oppression of race and gender’ (88).

Walker, indeed, tackles several themes in this novel in order to demonstrate how all kinds of oppression are interlocked and cannot be discussed separately from one another, but the focus of analysis in this chapter is on how Walker manages to deconstruct the transcendence/immanence dualism to express the spiritual insight that many of the characters gain by the end of the novel. As already established above, for Walker, spirituality is a principal constituent of womanist thought. She argues that spirituality is a state that is more comprehensive and liberating than religion; that is, allows people to be free beyond the confines of religious institutions. Moreover, spirituality is a means to unite and bring people

together regardless of their different religious orientations, and this is related to Walker's notion of wholeness and oneness. In her Preface to the 2003 edition of *The Color Purple*, Walker describes her novel as a theological work that examines her journey from the religious back to the spiritual (i). Actually, in her attempt to escape from the confines of Christianity, which she conceives as a patriarchal and 'imperialist tool used against Africa' (*In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* 266), Walker goes beyond religion and replaces it with spirituality. According to Walker, the Christian version of God is constructed, masculinised and racialised. It has been constructed and appropriated to serve a patriarchal white culture. She admits that she rejects practising religion in a 'white' church (*In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* 18). She explains: 'As a college student I came to reject the Christianity of my parents, and it took me years to realize that though they had been force-fed a white man's palliative, in the form of religion, they had made it into something at once simple and noble' (*In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* 17-18).

Walker's critique of white religion is evident from the very beginning of the novel when Celie writes her first letter to God. Celie reveres God and writes to Him in a very respectful manner. She regards him as the repository of her secrets and as her only saviour. She confuses her stepfather with God because his power and control over her makes him Godlike to her. When her mother asks whose her two children are, she says: 'God's' (4). When her stepfather takes them away, she says: 'God took them' (4). It is her abusive stepfather who is the father of her two children, Olivia and Adam; and he tells her to say that these children are God's. He exploits the naivety of this young girl and implants in her mind that men are God's image on earth and, consequently, obeying men is the same as obeying God. Celie imagines God to be 'all white' and 'looking like some stout *white man* work at the bank' (85, my italics). This was the image of God in the eyes of many black people until they began to gain spiritual insight by re-envisioning their view of God.

Celie continues to hold this view of equating men with God even when she marries Mr._____, whose name turns out to be Albert. It is not until Celie meets Shug Avery, Albert's girlfriend and Walker's mouthpiece in the novel, that Celie's view about religion starts to change bit by bit. Shug, like Walker herself, deconstructs the transcendence/immanence dualism when she believes that the sacred is immanent in the world. Commenting on Shug's character, Walker states, Shug

is saying what I too believe [...]. I have also kept Celie's grasp of the concept that what is holy is the whole thing, not something above it or beyond it, not something

separate from herself [...]. And that the earth itself produces all the wonders, along with the sorrows, anyone could want. (*The Same River Twice* 35-36)

Walker believes that '[a]ll people and living things are the body and soul of God. And that people serve God not by making the earth and its people suffer but by making the earth and its people whole' (*Anything We Love Can Be Saved* 188). The core of Walker's understanding of the relationship between God and the world is expressed explicitly when she maintains:

It is fatal to love a God who does not love you. A God specifically created to comfort, lead, advise, strengthen, and enlarge the tribal borders of someone else. We have been beggars at the table of a religion that sanctioned our destruction. Our own religion denied, forgotten; our own ancestral connections to All Creation something of which we are ashamed. (*Anything We Love Can Be Saved* 25)

Here Walker echoes the above-mentioned feminist Christian theological views—such as those of Rosmary Radford Ruether, Sallie McFague and Nancy Frankenberry—about the existence of God in 'All Creation', though Walker's conception of God is broader than that based in Christian theology. 'All Creation' here refers to all beings: nature, animals, and humans. It is Walker's contention that spiritual wholeness can be achieved only when all the boundaries come down between the forms of life in 'All Creation'. She develops this idea in her conceptualisation of the relationship between (wo)men and animals—as will be explored in Chapter Three of the thesis. Shug Avery echoes Walker's opinion when she says to Celie: 'I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it. [...] People think pleasing God is all God care about. But any fool living in the world can see it always trying to please us back' (176). Shug means that in order to please God, people should show consideration for everything, including black women because too they are God's creation. Walker significantly uses the colour purple to refer to black women. According to her, 'Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender' (*In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* xii). What Walker means by formulating this womanist principle can be understood in symbolic terms when one considers the significations of the colours "purple" and "lavender". Within scholarship on colours, the colours purple and lavender are found to be gendered and typically related to women. Lavender signifies femininity, while purple signifies royalty and mystery.¹³ Thus, through her symbolic employment of colour, Walker

¹³ In her study of the significance of colours, for example, Jacqui Howard Bear points out that 'while purple is the color of royalty, lavender is the color of femininity' (Para. 3). Also in her book *If It's Purple, Someone's Gonna Die: The Power of Color in Visual Storytelling* (2005), Patti Bellantoni explores the relationship between

implies that feminists are more preoccupied with interrogating gender issues—as symbolised by the colour lavender—and womanists, who have more intersectional concerns, are more preoccupied with exploring spirituality—as symbolised by the colour purple.

As Walker's mouthpiece, Shug gradually teaches Celie that being spiritual is more important than being religious in the strict and narrow sense of the word. Shug's spirituality stems from her love of nature. It is not abstract, but embodied in the whole creation. When Celie asks Shug to describe God, Shug says: '*He* big and old and tall and graybearded and *white*. He wear white robes and go barefooted' (174, my italics). Shug says to Celie: 'If you wait to find God in church, Celie, she say, that's who is bound to show up, cause that's where he live [...]. Cause that's the one that's in the white folks' white bible' (174). Then Shug tells Celie how she denounced the male white God and found a more liberating God. She says: 'When I found out I thought God was white, and a man, I lost interest' (174). Both Celie and Shug identify God as male and white; but because Shug is more conscious than Celie, she tries to find a different God for herself from the very beginning of the novel. She believes that God is omnipresent in all living creatures. That is why she refers to God with the neutral pronoun 'it' in order to escape referring to Him as a man. She tells Celie: 'The thing I believe. God is inside you and me and inside everybody else. You come into the world with God. But only them that search for *it* inside find *it*' (175, my italics). Walker's critique of the narrow understanding of religion is evident when Shug tells Celie that denouncing the male white God does not mean not having religion: 'Hold on just a minute here. Just because I don't harass it like some peoples us know don't mean I ain't got religion' (172). She adds that she can find God anywhere outside the walls of the white church:

Celie, tell the truth, have you ever found God in church? I never did. I just found a bunch of folks hoping for him to show. Any God I ever felt in church I brought in with me. And I think all the other folks did too. They come to church to share God, not find God. (173)

Walker argues that God does not exist beyond nature: 'the truth is that I don't believe there is a God beyond nature. The world is God. Man is God. So is a leaf or a snake' (*In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* 265). This idea is echoed in Shug's words when she says to Celie:

My first step from the old white man was trees. Then air. Then birds. Then other people. But one day when I was sitting quiet and feeling like a motherless child,

colours and cultures. She argues that the colour purple is related to the 'royal' and the 'mystical' and indeed it does 'hold a powerful sway in the realm of the noncorporeal, the mystical, and even the paranormal' (190)

which I was, it come to me: that feeling of being part of everything, not separate at all. I knew if I cut a tree, my arm would bleed. (175)

This encapsulates Shug's belief in 'being part of everything.' Shug also tries to make Celie aware that God is not man. God's existence can be felt by looking at anything in the whole world:

Man corrupt everything [...]. He on your box of grits, in your head, and all over the radio. He try to make you think he everywhere, you think he God. But he ain't. Whenever you trying to pray, and man plop himself on the other end of it, tell him to git lost [...]. Conjure up flowers, wind, water, a big rock. (176)

Significantly, towards the middle of the novel, Celie realises that God has never done anything to save her from oppression simply because He is male and white. She says to Nettie: 'I don't write to God no more, I write to you' (172). As a result, she decides to denounce God as a monolith. She says to Shug:

Anyhow, I say, the God I been praying and writing to is a man. And just like all the other mens I know. Trifling, forgetful, and lowdown. . . . Let 'im hear me, I say. If he ever listened to the poor colored women, the world would be a different place, I can tell you. (172)

It is at this very moment that Celie realises that she is a full woman who has legitimate rights to live happily and peacefully without humiliation or degradation. Consequently, she revolts against Mr. _____, whom she has dared not even look at before, and faces him with his reality as a hateful person. She decides to leave him and when Mr. _____ asks her what is wrong, she answers bravely: 'You a lowdown dog is what's wrong, I say. It's time to leave you and enter *into the Creation*. And your dead body just the welcome mat I need' (178, my italics). When Celie enters 'into the Creation', she becomes able to both tolerate and overcome all those who have done injustices to her, especially her stepfather and her husband. This state of wholeness in Celie's character is reflected in her last letter which she addresses to everyone and everything on earth: 'Dear God. Dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear Everything. Dear God' (252). Here Celie is absorbed in a state of oneness with everything: with God, with human beings, and with the elements of nature.

Celie and Shug are not the only characters who are engaged in this process of spiritual maturation in the novel. Nettie and her husband Samuel also envision a different conception of God at the end of the novel after their missionary experience in Africa. The Olinka tribe in Africa worship the 'roofleaf' and take it as their God because it protects them from rain. The

Olinka people say: ‘We know a roofleaf is not Jesus Christ, but in its own humble way, is it not God’ (139). She writes to Celie towards the end of the novel:

God is different to us now, after all these years in Africa. More *spirit* than ever before, and more *internal*. Most people think he has to look like something or someone—a roofleaf or Christ—but we don’t. And not being tied to what God looks like, frees us. When we return to America we must have long talks about this, Celie. And perhaps Samuel and I will found a new church in our community that has no idols in it whatsoever, in which each person’s spirit is encouraged to seek God directly, his belief that this is possible strengthened by us as people who also believe. (227, my italics)

At the end of her novel, Walker projects a wonderful vision of an ideal society in which there is love, justice, and understanding. Almost all the characters are involved in a process of reaching self-definition and spiritual awareness in order to attain this state of wholeness and togetherness. Mr. _____ who used to be arrogant, aggressive, and sexist in the course of the novel is transformed into a tolerant man who lives peacefully with all people around him. Even his relationship with Celie changes as they become good friends who talk and work together. Celie describes this reformation in the character of Mr. _____, saying: ‘When you talk to him now he really listen, and one time, out of nowhere in the conversation us was having, he said Celie, I’m satisfied this the first time I ever lived on Earth as a natural man. It feel like a new *experience*’ (my italics, 260). Mr. _____ feels himself a new man, a natural man, and a whole man only when he comes to terms with himself and with all those that he mistreated and oppressed before. The state of harmony and wholeness between Celie and Mr. _____ is reflected in their last—and actually first—conversation at the end of the novel: ‘I have love and I have been love. And I thank God he let me gain understanding enough to know love can’t be halted just cause some peoples moan and groan’. When a surprised Celie asks him what happened to him, he says: ‘Just *experience*. You know, everybody bound to git some of that sooner or later’ (my italics, 269-270). Sofia also tells Celie: ‘I know you won’t believe this, Miss Celie [...] but Mr. _____ act like he trying to git religion’ (197). Here it is evident how Walker critiques the narrow sense of being religious as merely church attendance. Religion, for Walker, is life and experience. Mr. _____ has attended church throughout his life, but he does not become spiritually whole and truly religious until he gains ‘experience’, that is, living religious principles in real life.

Interestingly, Walker continues the story of Celie and Shug Avery in *The Temple of My Familiar*. This novel consists of intricately interwoven plots with numerous characters

and various themes; but again the focus here is on the theme of religion as it connects to the transcendence/immanence debate. Part Two of the novel is a continuation of the story of Celie and Shug Avery, told from the perspective of Olivia, Celie's daughter. When Olivia talks about her experience in Africa with her brother Adam, her aunt Nettie, and her adoptive parents, the imperialist discourse of Christianity is disclosed. Olivia maintains: 'You might say the white man, in his dual role of spiritual guide and religious prostitute, spoiled even the most literary form of God experience for us' (107). The imperialist scheme of Christianity at that time in Africa was to convince African people that when they subordinate themselves to white people and white culture they are pleasing God because God Himself is white. This has led Olivia and her family and many Africans to denounce Christianity as an institutionalised religion:

My father, Samuel, was a missionary also, but by the time we returned to America he had long since lost his faith; not in the spiritual teachings of Jesus, the prophet and human being, but in Christianity as a religion of conquest and domination inflicted on other peoples. (106)

Olivia distinguishes between losing faith in God and losing faith in Christianity as an imperialist discourse. Olivia and her family discover in Africa that "God" was not a monolith [...], and not separate from us, or absent from whatever world one inhabited' (106-107). Olivia deconstructs the transcendence/immanence dualism when she states that religion and life are not dualistic and that God can be felt in the world itself not beyond it. She says:

The religion that one discovered on one's own was a story of the earth, the cosmos, creation itself; and whatever 'Good' one wanted could be found not down the long road of eternity, but right in one's own town, one's home, one's country. *This world.* (107, original italics)

As illustrated in the analysis of *The Color Purple* above, Shug Avery denounces Christianity as a monolithic religion that oppresses black people in general and women in particular. Here she creates her own religion, founds her own church, and writes her own gospel which she calls 'The Gospel According to Shug'. Shug's church is not a fenced building; rather it is any spacious area such as 'the barn or the shed' (123). According to Olivia, people who seek Shug's liberating church do not worship the same God but they have the same faith and spirit: 'Some of these people worshiped Isis. Some worshiped trees. Some thought the air, because it alone is everywhere, is God. ("Then God is not on the moon," someone said). Mama Shug felt there was only one thing anyone could say about G-O-D, and that was—it had no name' (123). Shug not only changes the usual location of the church, she

changes its name as well. Fanny, Olivia's daughter, says that Shug and Celie call their church 'a band'. For them a band 'means a group of people who share a common bond and purpose and whose notion of spiritual reality is radically at odds with mainstream or prevailing ones' (212). This word 'band' is really significant. Originally 'band' refers to a group of musicians who play different musical instruments together in harmony to create a beautiful tune. Symbolically, Shug and Celie want people to worship God and to practise religion in harmony. People may differ in the name they assign to God, but their common faith gathers them spiritually in a harmonious way to create a better world.

In Part Five of the novel, Walker elaborates on 'The Gospel According to Shug'. Because Shug is often Walker's mouthpiece, one can say that Shug's conceptions of religion and life as set out in this gospel are indeed Walker's views about re-envisioning Christianity and all organised religions. In this gospel, Walker calls for an ideal life in which there are no hierarchies and no oppressions. All people live in harmony and love and their spirits 'know no boundaries, even *between heaven and earth*' (203, my italics). This breaking of boundaries between heaven and earth is, indeed, a breaking of boundaries between transcendence and immanence.

In her womanist and ecowomanist stance, Walker attempts to dismantle all lines and hierarchies between transcendence and immanence as a means to eradicate all kinds of oppression and in order to create a whole and holy world.

Deconstructing the Transcendence/Immanence Dualism in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*:

Like Alice Walker, Toni Morrison also critiques Christianity as an organised religion that is based on a dualistic conception of the relationship between transcendence and immanence. Toni Morrison also has a religious background and repeatedly uses Christian allusions and symbols in her work as a literary writer. In her interview with Pam Houston, she states: 'I am a Catholic; some of my family is Catholic, some of them are Protestant, some of them are all sorts of things. And what saved me was, I think—what helped me at any rate—was knowing I was going to take religion seriously, I mean belief. [...] *Faith*. Seriously' (254, my italics). She admits too in another interview, with James Marcus: 'I'm a religious person. As you might guess, I have arguments with institutionalized religion' (No Pagination). Like Walker and all womanist thinkers, however, Morrison rejects religion that is narrow and doctrinaire. She uses the all-encompassing word 'faith' instead of 'religion'

because it accommodates all kinds of belief and worship without creating any hierarchies between religious orientations. Like Walker, Morrison does not reject Christianity altogether, but she re-envisioned it to fit the needs of black people. Anissa Janine Wardi is surely correct when she maintains that ‘Morrison does not reduce the import of Christianity in the lives of her characters, recognizing that much of African American culture is significantly imbricated in Christian thought. However, Morrison illustrates how the narratives, iconography and rituals of Christianity are transformed by the historical exigencies of Black culture’ (176). This idea supports the womanist principle discussed above that not all believers are faithful and not all non-believers are faithless.

Morrison’s *Paradise* (1997) is the most exemplary of her works embodying her views about religion. It is her first published novel after she was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1993, and the third novel in the loose trilogy which includes *Beloved* (1987) and *Jazz* (1992). *Paradise* is a dynamic illustration of how Morrison deconstructs all boundaries and hierarchies between religion/life, God/world, and transcendence/immanence. Sharon Jessee points out that *Paradise* dramatises ‘the interception of something metaphysical and divine into the earthly realm’ (131). Set in the 1960s and 1970s and going more than fifty years back in time, the novel recounts the history of Ruby, an all-black fictional town in Oklahoma. The title of the novel is significantly and intentionally misleading. It gives the impression that Morrison is creating a utopian vision of the world whereas, in fact, she describes a dystopian society that is based on conflict. That is why the original title of the novel was *War* before the editors refused this and Morrison changed it to *Paradise*. Throughout the novel, Morrison critiques the idea of the celestial paradise that is based on hierarchy and exclusion. In her conversation with Farnsworth, Morrison contends that one of her aims in *Paradise* was the ‘interrogation of the whole idea of paradise’ which is ‘based on the notion of exclusivity. All paradises, all utopias are designed by who is not there, by the people who are not allowed in’ (156). Morrison suggests an earthly paradise as she maintains that she is ‘interested in the kind of violent conflict that could happen as a result of efforts to establish a Paradise. Our view of Paradise is so limited [...]. It’s really defined by who is *not* there as well as who is’ (Morrison and Marcus, No Pagination, original italics).

Religion is one of the main themes in the novel. In her interview with Carolyn C. Denard, Morrison comments on how religion functions in *Paradise*: ‘There are lots of conflicts in the book, and religion is one. Not religious believers versus non-believers so much as what turns out to be conflict between politics and faith’ (191). Indeed, there are various religious orientations in Ruby. Jennifer Terry in her ‘A New World Religion?’

Creolisation and Candomblé in Toni Morrison's *Paradise* contends that '[p]art of this narrative project is the exploration of various forms of religious worship, concluding with the proposition of an alternative paradise' (192). As for organisational religion, there are three main Protestant churches led by three ministers: the Baptist Church led by Reverend Richard Misner, the Methodist Church led by Reverend Senior Pulliam, and the Pentecostal Church led by Reverend Simon Cary. There used to be also a Catholic boarding school for Indian girls led by some nuns before it was turned into a refuge, an informal Convent, led by Consolata to protect all the throwaway women in the novel. The trio of Reverend Pulliam, Reverend Misner, and Reverend Cary debate over the meaning of God's love and the relationship between God and the world throughout the novel. This is one of the major themes in the novel as Morrison contends, 'Love of God is what the book is about. It's about spiritual love' (Morrison and Hostetler 198). Each one of the three ministers has a congregation that follow his views: 'Each congregation had people who were among or related to the fifteen families to leave Haven and start over' yet the 'Oven didn't belong to any one denomination; it belonged to all, and all were asked to show up at Calvary' (83). The Oven is a communal kitchen where all the congregations of Ruby gather to cook, to celebrate, and to attend baptism parties.

The debate amongst the three ministers, especially between Reverend Pulliam and Reverend Misner, is similar to the debate between Old Testament and New Testament views of religion. Morrison states: 'I'm interested in the differences between, say, the very stern Old Testament view of religion, with its emphasis on punishment, and the individualistic notion of God being in you. These two things are constantly being debated, even now' (Morrison and Marcus Para. 7). Morrison brilliantly summarises this religious conflict in the novel in the symbolic motto that is inscribed on the Oven. When a black man called Zechariah moves with eight families—referred to as the 8-rock families—to Ruby in 1952 (Ruby used to be called Haven when it was founded by older generations long time ago), following a vision he has some words inscribed on the Oven. Zechariah is the grandfather of the twin brothers Steward and Deacon Morgan who are the leaders of Ruby in the 1970s. The motto is written as '...the Furrow of His Brow' (86). There is an intentional ellipsis here because Morrison does not want to force an interpretation on her readers. The narrator comments that Zechariah must have taken much time to formulate these words that can be understood both as a command and a threat: 'It must have taken him months to think up those words—just so—to have multiple meanings: to appear stern, urging obedience to God, but slyly not identifying the understood proper noun or specifying what the Furrow might cause

to happen or to whom' (195). The older generation, represented by Reverend Pulliam, read it as "Beware the Furrow of His Brow". They interpret it as an order as suggested by the imperative mode; whereas the young generation, represented and supported by Reverend Misner, interpret it as "Be the Furrow of His Brow" (86). The senior generation represent the Old Testament with its emphasis on the punishment of God. The ruling men of Ruby such as Steward and Deacon follow the older generation's view because they want a community where what they see as God's rule is obeyed and people carry out their orders. Phillip Page points out that:

"Beware" is the choice of the ruling generation, in particular the powerful men of Ruby who demand strict adherence to the old order, the old ways of running things [...]. Requiring law, order, and the preservation of the status quo, they opt for an Old Testament deity whose furrowed brow enforces an irreplaceable regime of cosmic justice. (639)

While the older generation, coinciding with the leadership, want to preserve the status quo, Reverend Misner and the younger generation opt for change. Therefore, they read the motto as "Be the Furrow of His Brow". They appear to want 'a more participatory New Testament relationship with God' (Page 639). The older generation believe that "Be" is not suitable here because no one can be God. The young man Destry explains: 'It's not being Him, sir; it's being His instrument, His justice' (87). Reverend Pulliam replies: 'God's justice is His alone. How you going to be His instrument if you don't do what He says?' (87). Reverend Pulliam is trying to convince people that it is very difficult to attain God's satisfaction and love. He argues, 'Love is divine and difficult always. If you think it is easy you are a fool. If you think it is natural you are blind' (141). He also says to people: God 'is interested only in Himself [...]. God is not interested in you' (142).

On the other hand, the younger generation focus on God's benevolence rather than His punishment. Reverend Misner maintains: 'We treasure His strength but we mustn't ignore His love. That's what keeps us strong' (61). According to the young people in the 1970s, 'No ex-slave would tell us to be scared all the time. To "beware" God. To always be ducking and diving, trying to look out every minute in case He's getting ready to throw something at us, keep us down' (84). The town's youth consider their grandfathers as ex-slaves who used to obey others and carry out orders unquestionably. For them, the older people are not used to making their own decisions freely. This conflict causes the old generation to disapprove of the Civil Rights Movement as supported by Reverend Misner and the youth. According to Morrison in her interview with Jaffrey, Reverend Misner is

‘struggling mightily with the tenets of his religion, the pressures of the civil rights, the dissolution of the civil rights (141). Reverend Pulliam and the ruling men want people to obey them blindly in the name of God. Yet it is revealed this is for their interests only, not for the sake of God. What proves this is that when they argue about the motto, both parties interpret it in terms of power. Harper Jury, one of the older generation, says that ‘Beware’ means ‘Look out. The power is mine. Get used to it’; whereas Sargeant, one of the younger generation, interprets ‘Be’ as ‘putting Him aside and you the power’ (87).

Significantly, Morrison depicts women as more conscious, more open, more tolerant, and more encompassing in their interpretation of the Oven motto. For example, Dovey, Steward’s wife, believes that “‘Furrow of His Brow” alone was enough for any age or generation. Specifying it, particularizing it, nailing its meaning down, was futile. The only nailing needing to be done had already taken place. On the Cross’ (93). Similarly, Patricia Best, who is considered to be Ruby’s historian and an implicit voice for Morrison herself, realises that ‘[i]t wasn’t God’s brow to be feared. It was his own, their own’ (217). She means Zechariah, the man who formulated the words, and the 8-rock families as led by Deacon and Steward Morgan. When she realises this patriarchal scheme to control everything under the mantle of religion, she burns the history papers of Ruby (217). Lone DuPres, the town’s midwife, also has a liberating interpretation of the motto. According to her, God ‘did not thunder instructions or whisper messages into ears. Oh, no. He was a liberating God. A teacher who taught you how to learn, to see for yourself’ (273). It is significant that towards the end of the novel, a third interpretation of the Oven words is suggested by the young people of Ruby: ‘No longer were they calling themselves Be the Furrow of His Brow. The graffiti on the hood of the Oven now was “We Are the Furrow of His Brow”’ (298). The shift from the imperative verbs “Beware” and “Be” to the declarative “We” suggests a participatory relationship between God and people. This, in Page’s opinion, implies that they are indeed more engaged in a mutual and participatory relation (639). By using the pronoun “We” to refer to God *and* people, Morrison deconstructs the God/world dualism. For Morrison, the relationship between God and the world is engaging and participatory rather than dualistic and hierarchical.

Morrison’s critique of the sexist, capitalist, and imperialist discourses of Christianity is very evident in the incident of the shooting of the innocent Convent women. The Convent had first been a mansion, then a Catholic Boarding School for Indian girls before it was closed and became an informal shelter for runaway and mistreated women. It was first managed by many nuns including Mary Magnus. Then, after Mary Magnus’ death the

Convent was run by a woman of Brazilian origin called Consolata or Connie. *Paradise* opens as the ruling men of Ruby attack the Convent and the very first sentence in the narrative is ‘They shoot the white girl first’ (3). Throughout the whole narrative there is no indication of who the white girl is. What is confirmed is that Consolata is surely dead; but community members and the readers cannot be sure whether the other four women are dead or not. Morrison intentionally does not reveal the racial origins of the Convent women because she depicts the Convent as an earthly paradise in which there are no hierarchies between people. Morrison mentions race as an identifying feature of the women only once at the very beginning because, according to her, race is already there but it does not matter. In her interview with Farnsworth Morrison states: ‘my point was to flag race and then to erase it’ (157).

According to Terry, in *Paradise*, ‘institutional religion is allied with patriarchy, conservatism and colonialism’ (192). The authoritarian ruling men of Ruby are worried about the erosion of their power because the Convent women are self-sufficient, powerful, and do not need men in any way. This is the main reason why the 8-rock families, with the support of Reverend Pulliam and Reverend Cary, attack them. Reverend Cary is the one who urges people to attack the Convent. He says to the townsmen: ‘I *know* they got powers. Question is whose power is stronger’ (275-276, original italics). The narrator comments that the Convent’s ‘No men’ is what infuriates him (276). As a man of institutional religion, Reverend Cary makes use of his position to convince people that this attack is for the sake of God. The Convent women are described as ‘Bodacious black Eves unredeemed by Mary’ (18). This sums up the stereotypical image or two female archetypes of Eve and Mary that Morrison critiques in the novel. According to Reverend Cary, the Convent women are ‘Bitches. More like witches’ (276). He adds: ‘These here sluts out there by themselves never step foot in church [...]. They don’t need *men* and they don’t need *God*’ (276). Notice the last sentence in this quotation. Reverend Cary uses parallelism to equate men with God. This is the patriarchal view that claims that men are the closest to the image of God. Reverend Cary convinces people that these women are ‘impure’ and ‘unholy’ (297) and that the Convent is ‘a coven’ because these women ‘chose themselves for company’ (276). Yet, Morrison subtly reveals the actual intention for this massacre when Reverend Cary asks men in the middle of his speech: ‘How you going to miss a house that size out here in land flat as a nail head?’ (276). The ruling men want to get rid of the inhabitants of the Convent in order to take the land for themselves.

The capitalist and materialist face of Christianity as an organised religion is revealed via the characters of Steward and Deacon Morgan. As the narrative develops, Steward's and Deacon's 'Protestantism is increasingly associated with material greed rather than religious devotion' (Terry 194). As businessmen, the Morgans choose to be Baptist not because they are religiously inclined to the Baptist church, but because the Baptist church has the largest congregation and this, of course, will make them more popular and will advance their business. The narrator comments that 'the Baptists were the largest congregation in town as well as the most powerful. So the Morgans sorted Reverend Misner's opinions carefully to judge which were recommendations easily ignored and which were orders they ought to obey' (56-57). The Morgans belong to the Baptist church because they want religion to be a veil that facilitates their control and business deals. The narrator explicitly states that Steward and Deacon behave 'as if God were their silent business partner' (143). Indeed, Steward and Deacon regard God as their 'business partner' because they develop their business in the name of God.

While Protestantism is allied with sexism and capitalism, Catholicism holds the connotations of historic imperialism in the novel. When the Convent was a Catholic school for Indian girls, its name was 'CHRIST THE KING SCHOOL FOR NATIVE GIRLS' (224, original emphasis). The name makes clear that the school's work is linked to a missionary project in the name of Christ. According to Terry, Mary Magnus' position when she takes street and Native girls into the church's care 'illustrates the missionary project of organised religion' (196). When Mary Magnus was working in Brazil, she kidnapped the nine-year-old Consolata, among other girls. The Catholic nuns then work to make the little girls forget their original religion and their native languages. The narrator comments:

It was an opportunity to intervene at the heart of the problem: to bring God and language to natives who were assumed to have neither; to alter their diets, their clothes, their minds; to help them despise everything that had once made their lives worthwhile and to offer them instead the privilege of knowing the *one and only God* and a chance, thereby, for *redemption*. (227, my italics)

The Catholic nuns assume that any religious orientation that is not Catholicism is not a religion at all, and any language that is not European does not count. They believe, and convince the girls, that they will not be redeemed unless they follow the true Catholic faith.

The most important dimension of the way in which Morrison deconstructs the transcendence/immanence dualism is revealed in the story of the Convent women, particularly in the story of Consolata. Mary Magnus has taught Consolata that her body is a

hindrance to redemption and that if she wants to gain God's love she must ignore her body and try to develop her spirit. According to the narrator, 'For thirty years she [Consolata] offered her body and her soul to God's Son and His Mother as completely as if she had taken the veil herself' (225). This is a clear example of how organised religion creates a dualism between spirit/body, God/world, and transcendence/immanence. Jennifer Terry explains that this relates to power, for example, 'by separating the material and spiritual spheres, slave owners could promise heavenly fulfillment after death for those slaves who uncomplainingly endured hardship and suffering in the present' (201). For Consolata and the Indian girls, their assimilation into a religion that rests on a duality of the material and the spiritual forms a part of the process of colonisation and also signals their absorption into patriarchal order. In order to come to terms with her body after thirty years of ignoring it, as an adult Connie engages in a loving sexual relationship with Deacon Morgan. The narrator points out that 'those thirty years of surrender to the living God cracked like a pullet's egg when she met the living man' (225). Connie is so hungry for making love with Deacon in order to satisfy her body's desires that she bites his lip, drawing blood while kissing him. Consolata equates 'her hunger for Deacon with devotion to Jesus and the consumption of a transubstantiated body in Holy Communion' (Terry 198). Indeed, although quickly perceived as sexually threatening and dangerous, Connie had only the intention of love and fulfillment with Deacon. The narrative reveals she only needs to make a balance between her spirit and her body in order to feel whole. She says: "'Dear Lord, I didn't want to eat him. I just wanted to go *home*'" (240, my italics). Morrison uses the word 'home' here to refer to spiritual wholeness and healing where there is no duality between transcendence and immanence. Home, for Morrison, is the earthly paradise where there is no seclusion or exclusion. Home is love and co-existence. It is the place when transcendence and immanence are reconciled. Reverend Misner talks with Patricia Best about the true meaning of home, saying: 'But can't you even imagine what it must feel like to have a *true home*? I don't mean heaven. I mean *a real earthly home*. Not some fortress you bought and built up and have to keep everybody locked in or out. *A real home*' (213, my italics).

After the death of Mary Magnus, Consolata reaches this true home. She is spiritually whole and healed only when she comes to terms with her body and realises that her body is the path to spiritual wholeness, not a hindrance to it. Consolata tries to teach the Convent women how to be conscious of their own bodies by engaging in a ritual in which they draw outlines of their naked bodies and inscribe them as part of the narrative of their lives. When the Convent women are naked, Consolata's introductory speech tells them:

My child body, hurt and soil, leaps into the arms of a woman who teach me my body is nothing my spirit everything. I agreed her until I met another. My flesh is so hungry for itself it ate him [...]. Hear me, listen. *Never break them in two. Never put one over the other. Eve is Mary's mother. Mary is the daughter of Eve.* (263, my italics)

Here Connie awakens the women to their own corporeality and bodily as well as spiritual needs. As Terry contends, '[o]nly when she rejects the binary opposition of corporeality and spirituality can her dissatisfaction and such definitions be overcome' (198).

After she feels whole and healed, Connie knows the true meaning of being religious. Being religious does not mean regular church attendance. Despite living all her life in a church, she has not become religious until she knows that what is more important is to gain inner faith. She says to Lone: 'In my faith, faith is all I need' (244). Lone plays a great role in teaching Consolata how to find a balance between her body and her spirit. She tells her: 'You need what we all need: earth, air, water. Don't separate God from His elements. He created it all. You stuck on dividing Him from His works. Don't unbalance His world' (244). Lone's words are a clear example of how Morrison explores the deconstruction of the God/world dualism.

As mentioned above, Morrison delineates women in this narrative as more tolerant towards religious differences than men are. They are more understanding of the true meaning of faith. This is not only the case of Dovey Morgan, Lone DuPres, and Consolata as demonstrated above; Sweetie Fleetwood, the daughter-in-law of Arnold and Mable Fleetwood and the wife of Jefferson Fleetwood, is also depicted as having more all-encompassing faith than narrow religion. When Reverend Misner prays with Sweetie near the beginning of the narrative, we learn 'he felt as though his relationship with the God he spoke to was vague or too new, while hers was superior, ancient and completely sealed' (62). It is true that Morrison presents Reverend Misner as a man of religion who is approaching the true meaning of faith. However, Reverend Misner does not reach the utmost meaning of faith as the women in the narrative do. Reverend Misner is able to adapt Christianity to the needs of black people, but he cannot reach a wholeness beyond race as the women do. This is evident in how Morrison illustrates the development of the cross, as a symbol of Christianity, in the novel.

Morrison presents three kinds of cross. Steward Morgan believes that the cross has no importance at all. For him, '[a] cross was no better than the bearer' (154). He tells the story of his Big Daddy in a town called Pura Sangre where there was a sign 'No Niggers' at one edge and a cross at the other edge. He argues that he himself

had seen crosses between the titties of whores; military crosses spread for miles; crosses on fire in Negroes' yards, crosses tattooed on the forearms of dedicated killers. He had seen a cross dangling from the rearview mirror of a car full of whites come to insult the little girls of Ruby. (154)

Steward implies that Christianity has facilitated the oppression of black people and, therefore, the cross itself has no importance unless the person who holds it is righteous. Reverend Pulliam suggests a cross without a human figure on it. In Pulliam's view, religion is abstract only and cannot be embodied as suggested by the human figure. Pulliam's God is an in-itself, for-itself Being that is interested only in Himself. On the other hand, Reverend Misner gives a great importance to the cross; but he imagines a cross with a black human figure on it. He wants a type of Christianity that fits the current needs and lives of black people. For Reverend Misner, the cross is a medium by which religion can be both ordinary and sublime. It is a way of deconstructing the transcendence/immanence dualism because the cross itself signifies transcendence and the human figure signifies immanence. The narrator comments that '[t]he cross he held was abstract; the absent body was real, but both combined to pull humans from backstage to spotlight, from muttering in the wings to the principal role in the story of their lives' (146). In Misner's view, if you remove the human figure from the cross as Pulliam suggests, Christianity will be 'like any and every religion in the world: a population of supplicants begging respite from begrudging authority' (146). Misner believes that white people have 'no patent on Christianity; they [are] often its obstacle' (209). He wants to free Jesus from white religion. Reverend Misner is approaching the state of wholeness but he does not reach it because of the formalities his role as minister dictates and, shaped by his experiences in the Civil Rights Movement, his insistence on the preeminence of race and racial struggle. The narrator externalises the internal thoughts of Misner that he cannot give voice to. For Misner, 'God loved the way humans loved one another; loved the way humans loved themselves; loved the genius on the cross who managed to do both and die knowing it' (146). The narrator states that 'Richard Misner could not speak calmly of these things. So he stood there and let the minutes tick by as he held the crossed oak in his hands, urging it to say what he could not: that not only is God interested in you; He *is* you' (147, original italics).

At the end of the novel, when the ruling men of Ruby shoot the Convent women (thus looping back to the start), Morrison explicitly presents her view of true spirituality that is more encompassing than the confines of Christianity as an institutionalised religion. According to Shirley A. Stave, in *Paradise*, 'Morrison challenges Christianity—not to

mention Western cultural epistemology—through a revitalizing exploration of true spirituality’ (215). This is exemplified in the attitude of the Convent women when they undergo spiritual transformation. They ‘altered’ and became ‘sociable’ and ‘connecting’ (265). When the men go to the Convent to stalk the women, they are struck by the fact that ‘in a place that once housed Christians—well, Catholics anyway—not a cross of Jesus anywhere’ (7). They see the ‘outline of a huge cross [...]. Clean as new paint in the space where there used to be a Jesus’ (12). This is Morrison’s third kind of cross in which she suggests no cross at all. Morrison repudiates the cross as an empty sign of Christianity if it is not supported by good deeds in the world. This is the way she ultimately dismantles the religion/life dualism. According to Benjamin Burr, ‘[b]y removing the cross as a mythological signifier of salvation, *Paradise* reveals a deconstruction of Christianity and the Bible as dominant mythological discourses’ (160). He adds that ‘*Paradise* positions the possibility of redemption outside of the dominant salvific’ patriarchal discourse (160). The Convent women do without the cross as a shallow sign of being religious. What is more important for them is the inner spirituality, not the external sign of the cross.

It is significant that at the very end of the novel, the shot, missing women appear to come back into life and gather peacefully with their families. Morrison depicts them as revised Christ-like figures who are resurrected after death in order to save humanity. In her interview with Ann Hostetler, Morrison points out that ‘[a]fter his resurrection, Jesus appears to those who want to see him. Vision is a kind of life. The women of the convent in *Paradise* are not deified, but after death they appear to those who want to see them, just as the risen Christ appeared to his disciples’ (197). Therefore, Lone states that ‘God had given Ruby a second chance’ (297). Morrison depicts her view of earthly paradise in which there are no boundaries or hierarchies and in which there is no dualism between transcendence and immanence when Consolata imagines her paradise

where white sidewalks met the sea and fish the color of plums swam alongside children. She spoke of fruit that tasted the way sapphires look and boys using rubies of dice. Of scented cathedrals made of gold where gods and goddesses sat *in* the pews *with* the congregation [...]. Then she told them of a woman named Piedade, who sang but never said a word. (263-264, my italics)

Piedade is a municipality in the state of São Paulo, Brazil. This implies that Consolata wants to summon up and reconnect with her Brazilian origins. In Portuguese, Piedade means ‘compassion’, ‘piety’, ‘mercy’, ‘godliness’. On the very last page of the novel, Consolata’s earthly paradise comes true when she sits with Piedade by the oceanside. According to

Morrison, '[t]he vision Piedade has at the end of the novel—of a ship—hints at a vessel on which there is no hierarchy, no exclusion. That's why the "paradise" at the end of the novel is supposed to have a lowercase "p." In the first edition it had an uppercase "P"' (Morrison and Hostetler 198).¹⁴

Toni Morrison is seen to share many of the ideas of Walker in her deconstruction of the transcendence/immanence dualism. Like Walker, she believes that wholeness cannot be achieved without making a balance between spirit and body. She also questions Christianity as an organised religion that is complicit in patriarchal and imperialist agendas. She proposes faith as an all-encompassing word that includes all religious orientations and can lead to 'home'.

Deconstructing the Transcendence/Immanence Dualism in Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead*:

As an ecofeminist, Marilynne Robinson is highly alert to the hierarchical mechanism of dualisms. Her writing recognises that the God/world dualism is not a simple dichotomy that places God in opposition to the world, rather, this dualism entails other dualisms and hierarchies that oppress women, nature, and all marginalised groups by attaching all the positive terms—such as culture, transcendence, religion, human, man, spirituality, and the public—to God, and attaching all the negative terms—such as nature, immanence, secularism, animal, woman, materiality, and the private—to the world.

Thus, keeping all those views regarding the metaphysically-burdened God/world or transcendence/immanence dualism in mind, Marilynne Robinson begins by rejecting the mind/body dualism, as advanced by Descartes. She believes that it is 'a dichotomy that has plagued Western thought' (*Absence of Mind* 23). Robinson states:

It is usual to blame Descartes for the error that has been overcome. This is that same Descartes who proposed the pineal gland as the seat of the soul yet is blamed for creating a dichotomy between the mind/ soul and the physical body, a dichotomy that has plagued Western thought, if reports are to be credited. (*Absence of Mind* 23)

In Robinson's view, the Cartesian mind/body dualism is responsible for generating all the other dualisms that have plagued Western thought, including the God/world dualism. Yet, it is important to note that Robinson dismantles the God/world dualism not only because of her

¹⁴ This idea of heavenly home as a non-hierarchical ship might echo Marilynne Robinson's conception of the house as a floating ship in *Housekeeping*—as will be explored in the following chapter. According to this view of the fluidity of the house, Morrison might denote that paradise is not a fixed place; it can exist wherever there are happiness, tolerance, and justice.

feminist and ecofeminist orientation, but also because of her religious and humanist stance. Robinson's religious and humanist stance is highly influenced by the sixteenth-century French humanist and Protestant theologian John Calvin (born Jean Cauvin). Robinson is specifically influenced by two main notions in Calvin's theology: first, his idea of religion as an experience rather than a doctrine; and, second, his idea of human beings as the image of God. These are the two ideas that I will explore in this section. Thus, it is important first to shed some light on Calvin's theological contemplations. According to Calvin, 'with experience as our teacher we find God just as he declares himself in his Word' (98). He adds that the recognition of God 'consists more in *living experience* than in vain and high-flown speculation' (97, my italics). In Calvin's account, God is not a mere shadow in our minds; he believes that in order to know God well, we must contemplate His existence in His works. Calvin contends, '*We ought not to rack our brains about God; but rather, we should contemplate him in his works*' (61, original italics).

Calvin's second idea is that human beings are in the image of God. The more human beings love and tolerate each other, the closer they are to God. For Calvin, 'man was created in God's image' (186). He believes that 'Scripture helps in the best way when it teaches that we are not to consider that men merit of themselves but to look upon the image of God in all men, to which we owe all honor and love' (696). Calvin also states in a very famous and extensively cited extract:

Manifold indeed is the nimbleness of the soul with which it surveys heaven and earth, joins past to future, retains in memory something heard long before, nay, pictures to itself whatever it pleases. Manifold also is the skill with which it devises things incredible, and which is the mother of so many marvelous devices. These are unfailing signs of *divinity in man*. (57, my italics).

Robinson is highly influenced by these two above-mentioned theological notions in Calvin's thought. She is a mainstream Protestant as she explicitly states in *The Givenness of Things*: 'I am a mainline Protestant, a.k.a. a liberal Protestant' (261). Although the word 'liberal' is sometimes stigmatised and rejected in theological and religious contexts, Robinson insists that she is 'liberal'. Commenting on her view of religious liberalism, Robinson states:

I am myself a liberal. By that I mean I believe society exists to nurture and liberate the human spirit, and that large-mindedness and openhandedness are the means by which these things are to be accomplished. I am not ideological. (*The Givenness of Things* 258)

Robinson uses ‘liberal’ in opposition to ideological thought which here constrains thinking and feeling. She admits, ‘Liberal that I am, I would not presume to doubt the authenticity of the *religious experience* of anyone at all’ (‘Onward: Christian Liberals’ 47, my italics). As part of her liberal Protestantism, Robinson rejects the word ‘religion’—as it entails ideological boundaries—and prefers to use the word ‘faith’ or ‘belief’. She distinguishes between faith, belief or spirituality—that is open—and religion that is ‘prompted by certain politicians and religionists’ (‘That Highest Candle’ 131). Robinson argues that religion has a contested definition because the term is ‘in fact indefinable, and it would be greatly to our advantage to recognize this fact’ (‘That Highest Candle’ 130). According to her, it ‘has cost the world dearly’ to attempt to force definition on faith (‘That Highest Candle’ 130). She points out that ‘religion is by nature restless with itself, impatient within the constraints of its own expression’ (‘That Highest Candle’ 131). This leads Robinson to call for ‘a religionless Christianity’ (‘That Highest Candle’ 131) in which there are no institutional and ideological constraints on belief. In Robinson’s view,

To associate religion with unwavering faith in any creed or practice does no justice at all to its complexity as *lived experience*. Creeds themselves exist to stabilize the intense speculations that religion, which is always about the ultimate nature of things, will inspire. (‘That Highest Candle’ 131, my italics)

Robinson’s rejection of institutional and ideological religion leads her to celebrate religion as ‘lived experience’, in Calvin’s sense.¹⁵ Robinson admits, ‘I love “religious experience.” It is the most profound, most aesthetically instructive, most thought-liberating experience I have ever had’ (Robinson and Painter 486). She also states: ‘Faith takes its authority from subjective experience, from an inward sense of the substance and meaning of experience’ (*The Givenness of Things* 80). Robinson laments the fact that religion is used in a very narrow sense by many of its proponents and defenders in America (‘That Highest Candle’ 132). She maintains that ‘religion is not to be “understood”, but to be lived with’ (‘That Highest Candle’ 132). Amy Hungerford maintains that Robinson’s work is ‘part of the larger cultural effort to imagine how intense religious belief can coexist with doctrinal diversity in the shared space of public life as well as in the private enclaves of religious community or the nuclear family’ (xiv). She contends that ‘scholars since the 1980s have

¹⁵ It is important to note that Marilynne Robinson is influenced by many other philosophers and theologians than Calvin in advocating the idea of religion as a lived experience. For example, she is influenced by the theological thought of Jonathan Edwards and William James and she draws on them extensively in her fiction and non-fiction. This idea also resonates in the work of feminist theologian Charlotte Perkins Gilman in her book *His Religion and Hers* (1923).

emphasized “lived religion”— religion as practiced by individuals and communities—as a corrective to the field’s prior focus on organized religion and its institutional discourses’ (109).

In addition, Robinson rejects categories such as ‘religious’ and ‘unreligious’. She states:

I don’t like categories like religious and not religious. As soon as religion draws a line around itself it becomes falsified. It seems to me that anything that is written compassionately and perceptively probably satisfies every definition of religious whether a writer intends it to be religious or not’ (Robinson and Fay Para. 37)

As a liberal Protestant, Robinson believes that ‘[t]he us-versus-them mentality is a terrible corruption of the whole culture’ (Robinson and Fay Para. 55). She points out that there is not and should not be any opposition between religion and science. She contends, ‘the debate seems to be between a naïve understanding of religion and a naïve understanding of science’ (Robinson and Fay Para. 55). In Robinson’s view, ‘[i]f different systems don’t merge in a comprehensible way, that’s a flaw in our comprehension and not a flaw in one system or the other’ (Robinson and Fay Para. 53). She argues that ‘[a]ny definition of religion that assumes an opposition of religion to secularism is therefore misleading’ (‘That Highest Candle’ 136). In Robinson’s line of thought, ‘religion and public life are inextricably involved’ (*The Givenness of Things* 92). She attaches ‘religious value to generous, [...] liberal, social policy’ (*The Givenness of Things* 94). Consequently, she deplores the fact that ‘[t]here is at present an alienation from religion, even among the religious, that is a consequence of this privileging of information, for want of a better word, over experience, or of logic over history’ (*The Givenness of Things* 88).

Calvin’s idea of regarding human beings as the image of God exerts a great influence on Robinson’s thought. She maintains that ‘[i]n celebrating the body and the mind, and the experience of them both in life on earth, Calvin erased the distinction between the sacred and the profane’ (‘That Highest Candle’ 136). Following Calvin’s line of critique, Robinson states that ‘God made us in his image, that is, with attributes that we share with him’ (*The Givenness of Things* 79-80). She argues that ‘[t]he transformation of God from a figure of awe and fear to a force of love immanent in humankind grants him being, realized through consensus of belief’ (*Absence of Mind* 6). Furthermore, she believes that holiness inheres in everyone and that God confers dignity on every human being. This is a clear example of how she deconstructs the God/world or the transcendence/immanence dualism. Robinson maintains:

I believe in the holiness of the human person and of humanity as a phenomenon [...]. I believe holiness is a given of our being that, essentially, we cannot add to or diminish, whose character and reality are fully known to God and are fully valued only by him. What I might call personal holiness is, in fact, openness to the perception of the holy in existence itself and, above all, in one another. ('Onward, Christian Liberals' 43)

She adds: 'I believe in a holiness visited upon any mortal as divinely imputed righteousness, to use the old language, or in the love of the father for his child, to use the old metaphor' ('Onward, Christian Liberals' 47). In Robinson's view, '[t]he kingdom of God is among us' and '[t]he divine image in us' (*The Givenness of Things* 239 & 256). It is in this way that she can dismantle the God/world or the transcendence/immanence dualism. She believes that the image of the transcendent God is immanent in humankind ('Onward, Christian Liberals' 47), and that 'the concept of transcendence is based on a misreading of creation. With all respect to heaven, the scene of miracle is here, among us. The eternal as an idea is much less preposterous than time, and this very fact should seize our attention' (*Death of Adam* 243).

Turning to reading Robinson's fiction, we can draw on these insights on religion from her non-fiction. *Gilead* (2004) came out twenty-three years after Robinson's first novel *Housekeeping* (1981). It is the first novel in the *Gilead* trilogy which consists of *Gilead*, *Home* (2008), and *Lila* (2014). These novels are companions rather than sequels as their events run parallel to each other in time. They are all set in the same time (the late 1950s) and place (Gilead, Iowa). Moreover, they narrate almost the same events but from different perspectives. The town of Gilead, Iowa is a fictionalised version of the actual town of Tabor, Iowa. *Gilead* is a kind of pseudo autobiographical epistolary novel as it consists of a lengthy letter from a dying father to his son. Reverend John Ames is a dying seventy-seven-year-old preacher who is writing a lengthy letter to his seven-year-old son, contemplating on and reconsidering his perceptions of religion and life. This form becomes a vehicle for Robinson's exploration of ideas.

Gilead is, indeed, a vivid and thorough illustration of Robinson's ecofeminist and Calvinist humanist stance. John Ames is regarded as Robinson's mouthpiece as she vocalises the ideas she wants to express and examine through him. Reconsidering his notion of life and death, John Ames writes to his son that he regrets not relishing his life more. He laments the fact that he separated his religious experience from his day-to-day life. Ames used to believe that earthly life is nothing but a bridge that leads to the other world. He says to his son that he used to tell people that death 'was like going home. We have no home in this world' (4).

He confesses to his son: ‘I didn’t feel very much at home in the world, that was a fact. Now I do’ (4). Robinson depicts through the characterological, a lively example of how some men of religion abstain from all pleasures in life, showing a negative aspect of religious experience—as when John Ames writes to his son about baptism. He says that, for him, ‘water was made primarily for blessing, and only secondarily for growing vegetables or doing the wash. I wish I had paid more attention to it. My list of regrets may seem unusual, but who can know that they are, really. This is an interesting planet. It deserves all the attention you can give it’ (32). He adds: ‘There are pleasures to be found where you would never look for them. That’s a bit of fatherly wisdom, but it’s also the Lord’s truth, and a thing I know from my own long experience’ (45). Evidently, this is an example of how Robinson rejects separating life and the material planet from religious experience and, in this way too, challenges the transcendence/immanence or religion/life dualism as we witness Ames’ account of his changing views and realisation of regrets.

Further evidence that John Ames deplores the fact that he once placed religion in opposition to daily life appears when Ames talks about his sermons. When he reconsiders the topics that he tackled in his sermons, Ames finds that most of the sermons ‘might seem foolish or dull to me. It might be best to burn them’ (46). This is because these sermons involve topics that are abstract; topics that are not then related to people’s everyday encounters. Ames regrets that he, in his sermons, was so abstract that he was talking to himself rather than to other people: ‘Here I was a pastor of souls, hundreds and hundreds of them over all those years, and I hope I was speaking to them, not only to myself, as it seems to me sometimes when I look back’ (47). Having recognised his fault, John Ames tells his son that:

A good sermon is one side of a passionate conversation. It has to be heard in that way. There are three parties to it, of course, but so are there even to the most private thought [...]. That is a remarkable thing to consider. (51)

He adds that a good sermon is judged by not just the response it invites, but how life is manifest in it. ‘By “life” I mean something like “energy” (as the scientists use the word) or “vitality”’ (51). In this sentence, John Ames explicitly relates life to religion. It is in enjoying the pleasures and vitality of life that one better understands his religion. Therefore, Ames advises his son to enjoy life in itself and not to ignore it. He states: ‘I want your dear perishable self to live long and to love this poor perishable world, which I somehow cannot imagine not missing bitterly’ (60-61). Towards the end of the novel, John Ames points out

that ‘it is *religious experience* above all that authenticates religion’ (165, my italics). He quotes Coleridge who said ‘Christianity is a life, not a doctrine’ (204).

The second theme that Robinson tackles in the novel and through which she dismantles the transcendence/immanence dualism, is her sense of Calvin’s idea of the image of God in the world. John Ames warns his son against undervaluing life and the material world because it is precisely through materiality and immanence that one reaches spirituality and transcendence. He says that ‘blessing and sacrament are meditated through’ the body and physical life (79). Moreover, Ames affirms ‘the sacredness of the human creature’ (104). He admits that he does like Calvin’s image that ‘each of us is an actor on a stage and God is the audience’ because ‘it suggests how God might actually enjoy us’ in the way ‘you enjoy the *being* of a child’ (142, original italics). He adds: ‘You see how it is godlike to love the *being* of someone. Your *existence* is a delight to us’ (155, original italics). John Ames echoes Calvin’s thought when he states that ‘[e]very human being is worthy of honor’ (158). He writes to his son, ‘[w]hen you love someone to the degree you love [your mother], you see her as God sees her’ (159). John Ames simply explains ‘divinity in being’ saying that ‘there are certain attributes our faith assigns to God: omniscience, omnipotence, justice, and grace. We human beings have such a slight acquaintance with power and knowledge, so little conception of justice, and so slight a capacity for grace’ (171). It seems it is certain that human beings can never reach the attributes of God; but when everyone pays attention to the divine inside his/her soul, s/he will have a touch of such divinely attributes as power, justice, knowledge, and grace. Towards the end of the novel, John Ames quotes Calvin again when he states: ‘I fell to thinking about the passage in the *Institutes* where it says the image of the Lord in anyone is much more than reason enough to love him’ (215). Following Calvin’s line of thought, John Ames believes that people must love their enemies as well as their friends because they are all God’s creation and a reflection of God’s image. People must love each other because God loves all people: ‘It seems to me people tend to forget that we are to love our enemies, not to satisfy some standard of righteousness, but because God their Father loves them’ (215). John Ames states that he does not see ‘love of God’ and ‘mortal love’ as ‘separate things at all. If we can be divinely fed with a morsel and divinely blessed with a touch, then the terrible pleasure we find in a particular face can certainly instruct us in the nature of the very grandest love’ (232-233).

In precisely these contemplations and addresses posed within *Gilead*, we find a working through and modelling of Robinson’s deconstruction of the transcendence/immanence dualism. Calvin’s notion of religion as a lived experience and

humans as in the image of God provide the main source for her deconstructionist stance. But it is too a reiteration of Robinson's ecofeminist position in the first place, one which already enables her to dismantle the God/world dualism, among other metaphysically-burdened dualisms.

Conclusion:

After investigating the core engagements of Walker, Morrison, and Robinson regarding the deconstruction of the transcendence/immanence dualism, it might certainly be argued that the three of them bear similarities in the methods and means they adopt to dismantle this dualism. All three enact a shared ecofeminist stance in the way their works seek to deconstruct all kinds of dualisms in order to create a whole, healed, and holy view of an earthly world, one based on love, co-existence, and harmony, one free of boundaries and hierarchies. The three of them adopt a more liberating attitude towards religion; each repudiates the institutional discourses of Christianity but none rejects Christianity per se. Yet, it should be noted that there is a difference between Walker and Morrison, on the one hand, and Robinson, on the other, regarding their influences and the sources they use to deconstruct the transcendence/immanence dualism. Walker and Morrison, as black American women, shape responses to religion that are informed by a critical sense of organised religion's part in colonisation. Indeed, their works show how patriarchal and imperial orders have led to hierarchies where non-whites and women are aligned with immanence as part of their subordination and diminishment. In the face of this Walker draws on various heritages to invent and represent a form of liberating spiritual renewal in her women protagonists across three novels and formulates the holistic understandings of womanism. Morrison meanwhile in *Paradise* juxtaposes the religion of the ruling men of Ruby with a celebratory sense of the Convent women's reinvention and, especially through the story and teachings of Connie, an embracing of body and spirit as indivisible. It is worth noting that Walker turns to the Olinka culture and Morrison invokes syncretic Brazilian belief systems as further frames of reference as they confront the dualisms perpetuated by monolithic Christian religion. On the other hand, Robinson's holistic views are influenced by the theological humanism of thinkers such as Calvin and Jonathan Edwards. This prompts me to conclude that Robinson is more a liberal theological ecofeminist than an ecowomanist. In her novel *Gilead* we find the taking up of theological questions—in the vein of Protestant tradition—via Ames' letter writing while, simultaneously, Ames' realisations offer up a vision of living in a rewarding earthly world

that bears strong similarities with Walker and Morrison's affirmations, indicating a, to some extent, shared ecofeminist perspective.

CHAPTER TWO: Problematizing Gendered Domains: Ecofeminism and the Deconstruction of the Public/ Private Dualism

A woman is not a potted plant
Her roots bound
To the confines
Of her house

...

Her leaves trimmed
To the contours
Of her sex

...

A woman is wilderness
Unbounded
Holding the future

(Alice Walker's 'A Woman is Not a Potted Plant' from *The Cushion in the Road*)

From a feminist perspective, the public/private dualism might be regarded as directly related to the transcendence/immanence dualism, and as further crystallising the categorisation of women. In this chapter, I frame my critique of the public/private dualism within the larger frame of the critique of the duality of culture and nature established in the Introduction and the first chapter. This chapter therefore reiterates the structure of Chapter One, first offering an overview of key political and philosophical thinking around this dualism in order to establish a theoretical frame foregrounding and building on the public/private dualism that has long been gendered in Western thought; second, examining the two stages of the feminist reaction to this gendering of the public/private dualism: first and second-wave feminism and finally recent feminisms and, in particular, ecofeminism. The last section of the chapter discusses how ecofeminist authors Marilynne Robinson and Alice Walker deconstruct the public/private dualism in their narrative works. I will first examine Walker's *The Color Purple* and *Meridian*, then move on to explore how Robinson deconstructs the public/private dualism in her *Housekeeping* and *Lila*.

Gendering the Public/Private Dualism in Western Thought:

Women are "private," men are "public." A woman's life turns inward. Her "internality," her privateness, is symbolized by if not directly related to the fact that her sex organs and above all, her womb, are interior. Man's external organs symbolize his "externality," his outwardness, his "publicness." (Smith 317-318)

So wrote historian and biographer Page Smith in his *Daughters of the Promised Land* (1970). This quotation is just one example of the deep-rooted idea in Western thought that woman's natural place is the private sphere. Although Smith celebrates the contribution of women to American history in this book, he reconsolidates yet again the same patriarchal idea of domesticating women. But although this public/private dualism has been fundamental in Western thought since Plato, the semantics involved are more complex and historically inflected. The words public and private in themselves denote a multiplicity of concurrent meanings. The public sphere has been variously conceptualised as the realm of culture, of rationality, politics, production, and freedom; whereas the private sphere is variously the realm of nature, of irrationality, domesticity, reproduction, and necessity. Virginia Woolf placed this dualism at the heart of both *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas* and, leading into early second wave feminism, writers such as Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan recognised that a great part of women's problems may be seen to stem from this dualistic relation set up between the public and the private and the relegation of women to the private sphere throughout Western history. In her 'Feminist Critiques of the Public/Private Dichotomy', Carole Pateman points out that '[t]he dichotomy between the private and the public is central to almost two centuries of feminist writing and political struggle; it is, ultimately, what the feminist movement is about' (281). Indeed, Western cultural representation, to use Joan B. Landes's words, 'eclipsed women's interests in the public domain and aligned femininity with particularity, interest, and partiality' (7). Tracy E. Higgins also argues that critiquing the public/private intellectual trajectory has been one of the primary concerns of feminist theorising as 'the line between the home as private and the rest of civil and political society as public was defined by social norms as well as law, and *that line was clearly gendered*' (849, my italics).

Philosophers situated widely apart in thought, space and, time share this conviction of the necessity for relegating women to the private sphere and excluding them from public life. Most of these arguments are built on biological and essentialist reasoning that serves to present women as inappropriately equipped for public life by virtue of their natural capacities, i.e. pregnancy, child-rearing, and housekeeping, whereas men are associated with the political and the public sphere because of their supposedly superior modes of rationality. This gendered differential location is complex, however, so by way of framing the concerns of this chapter, a brief overview is offered, initially, of the key intellectual milestones that have entrenched this dualism in Western thought. In the Western tradition, the distinction between the public and the private again dates back to ancient Greece. In classical Greek political

thinking, the public (the *polis* or city) mainly referred to politics, so that the idea of the private (the *oikos* or household), by contrast, meant everything that was domestic. Therefore, that which was associated with the private sphere was completely denied the status of being political. The Greeks regarded the city-state (*polis*) and the family (*oikos*) as two separate realms that cannot be reconciled. According to them, for the citizen to be deemed good and to achieve immortal glory—*kleos*—he must forget about his private life and live only for the public.

It was Aristotle in his *Politics* who not only polarised the relationship between the public and the private, but clearly established the hierarchical relationship between them, stressing the supremacy of the public. For Aristotle, the concept of the public no longer, however, strictly refers to war and warrior duties as previously; the public sphere, for him, refers to politics in general. For him, politics as the realm of freedom carries the greatest authority because it encompasses all the others. Aristotle begins Book 1 of his *Politics* by stating:

We see that every CITY-STATE is a COMMUNITY of some sort, and that every community is established for the sake of some GOOD (for everyone performs every ACTION for the sake of what he takes to be good). Clearly, then, while every community aims at some good, the community that has the most AUTHORITY of all and encompasses all the others aims highest, that is to say, at the good that has the most authority of all. This community is the one called a city-state, *the community that is political*. (1, my italics)

For Aristotle, ‘a human being is by nature a political animal, and [...] anyone who is without a city-state, not by luck but by nature, is either a poor specimen or else superhuman’ (4). Aristotle argues that no human being has an importance in himself; for a human being to gain significance is to exist in a political community and live for this community. Because women at that time were not part of any body politic, Aristotle did not regard them as citizens and, consequently, he considered them to be insignificant. Aristotle gendered the public-private spheres when he relegated women to the domestic sphere and assigned to them the task of preserving the household. He claims: ‘For a man would seem a coward if he had the courage of a woman, and a woman would seem garrulous if she had the temperance of a good man, since even household management differs for the two of them (for his task is to acquire property and hers to preserve it)’ (73).

In addition to Aristotle’s writings, it is again Kant’s extensive writings on morals that similarly failed to give due right to women. Here again, Kant follows the classical tradition in

polarising the public/private spheres. For him, the private sphere is the sphere of domesticity and the family, whereas the public sphere is the sphere of politics and citizenship. But his account of citizenship is already unfair for women. In his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), Kant designates men as ‘active’ citizens, participating in politics and holding public offices, whereas women are assigned to the category of passive citizenship and related to the domestic sphere. For Kant, ‘freedom’, ‘civil equality’, and ‘independence’ are the attributes of a citizen (*Metaphysics of Morals* 125). Because the women of his time were seen to lack all three, Kant considered them not to be active citizens. He contends that ‘the only qualification for being a citizen is being fit to vote’ (126). Thus, although Kant categorises women as ‘passive citizens’, his definition of citizenship makes them no citizens at all. He simply uses the idea of ‘passive citizens’ as a kind of euphemism to describe women. And he even admits that ‘the concept of a passive citizen seems to contradict the concept of a citizen as such’ (*Metaphysics of Morals* 126). According to Kant, passive citizens include ‘all women, in general, anyone whose preservation in existence (his being fed and protected) depends not on his management of his own business but on arrangements made by another’ (126). According to such a definition, women lack civil identity and are therefore to be relegated to the domestic sphere. Also in his *Anthropology, History, and Education*—a work which contains articles written between 1764 and 1803—Kant maintains that ‘[w]oman regardless of age is declared to be immature in civil matters; her husband is her natural curator’ (315, original italics). He adds that men have ‘the supreme command’ in both the state and the household (406).

After Kant, Hegel once again is the key figure further reinforcing the political dispossession of women through continued polarisation of the public and the private spheres. His *Philosophy of Right* (1821) contains most of his important ideas on this public/private dualism though he does not, however, specifically use the terms ‘public’ and ‘private’, but instead refers to them via the concepts of ‘universality’ and ‘particularity’. In her ‘On Hegel, Women and Irony’, Seyla Benhabib, maintains that:

Women are viewed as representing the principles of particularity (*Besonderheit*), immediacy (*Unmittelbarkeit*), naturalness (*Natürlichkeit*), and substantiality (*Substanzialität*), while men stand for universality (*Allgemeinheit*), mediacy (*Vermittlung*), freedom (*Freiheit*), and subjectivity (*Subjektivität*). Hegel develops his rational ontology of gender within a logic of oppositions. (133)

According to Hegel, the spirit must have two kinds of consciousness in order to be complete: universal consciousness and individual or particular consciousness. By virtue of

their entering public life and engaging in politics, men achieve both kinds of consciousness, while women, who remain at home, have only individual consciousness. Therefore, for Hegel, too, men must have mastery over women:

In one sex the spiritual divides itself into two phases, independent, personal self-sufficiency, and knowing and willing of free *universality*. These two together are the self-consciousness of the conceiving thought, and the willing of the objective final cause. In the other sex the spiritual maintains itself in unity and concord. This sex knows and wills the substantive in the form of concrete *individuality* and feeling. In relation to what is without one sex exhibits power and mastery, while the other is subjective and passive. Hence the husband has his real essential life in the state, the sciences, and the like, in battle and in struggle with the outer world and with himself. Only by effort does he [...] reach self-sufficing concord. A peaceful sense of this concord, and an ethical existence, which is intuitive and subjective, he finds in the family. *In the family the wife has her full substantive place, and in the feeling of family piety realizes her ethical disposition.*¹⁶ (*Philosophy of Right* 144, my italics)

¹⁶ **Is Woman's Domesticity a Real Sign of Her Morality?**

This last italicised sentence in Hegel's quotation is very important not only in grasping the import of Hegel's account of women, but in understanding the thinking of many subsequent Western philosophers and writers. Here Hegel connects women's staying at home with their ethical and moral disposition. American philosopher and political intellectual Jean Bethke Elshain writes about this patriarchal idea of linking women's morality to their domesticity in her article 'Moral Woman and Immoral Man: A Consideration of the Public-Private Split and its Political Ramifications'. Commenting on the dual aspects involved in judging men's and women's morality, Elshain argues:

A "good" woman makes a "bad" citizen by definition. The woman who is a "good" citizen cannot, in the private sphere, be a "good" woman. She is judged in each instance by standards of so-called private morality. She is not to share in public immorality. Women are morally "superior" because they are publicly inferior. (461)

Indeed, woman's proclaimed moral superiority was used by patriarchy to justify her social, political, and economic inequality with man. According to that patriarchal view, the domestic sphere is viewed as a sacred altar to protect women from taking part in the contaminating and demoralising activities of the public sphere—as claimed. English Victorian thinker John Ruskin is one of the most prominent thinkers who associated women's morality with domesticity. In his article 'Of Queens' Gardens', which was originally a lecture delivered as a sequel to his first lecture 'Of Kings' Treasuries' and subsequently published in his book *Sesame and Lilies*, Ruskin apparently refuses the subjection of women to men. He argues that a wife has 'a *guiding*, not a determining, function' (162, original italics). Ruskin puts it clearly that:

Generally, we are under an impression that a *man's duties are public*, and a *woman's private*. But this is not altogether so. A man has a personal work or duty, relating to his own home, and a public work or duty, which is the expansion of the other, relating to the state. So a woman has a personal work or duty, relating to her own home, and a public work and duty, which is the expansion of that. (187-188, my italics)

A crucial work that touches upon this issue of linking domesticity to morality is *History of Woman Suffrage*, a book in six volumes published from 1881 to 1922 and written by American suffragists and feminist activists Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Matilda Joslyn Gage and Ida Husted Harper. In this book, the writers reminisce about their personal experiences in suffrage and public work, and quote the words of anti-suffragists who use this 'altar-house' image to justify women's staying at home. One of the suffragists ironically describes how men see the woman who seeks any public participation: 'There is something inexpressibly comical in man's "citizen woman". It reminds me of those monsters I used to see in the old world, head and shoulders woman, and the rest of the body sometimes fish and sometimes beast' (681). Another suffragist, Clarina I. Howard Nichols, quotes the words of an anti-suffragist Colonel. Introducing her to an audience to give a public speech, he announced:

Here Hegel claims that by virtue of their working outside the house, men are able to achieve both ‘universality’ and ‘particularity’—Hegel’s specific terms for the ‘public’ and the ‘private’. When men reconcile the universal and particular in their lives, they achieve ‘ethical existence’ and this makes them superior to women. However, though women lack this ‘universal’ existence, they can still achieve ‘ethical existence’ by being submissive, pious housewives—an issue that will be explored below.

Hegel not only implanted the idea of women’s domesticity in Western thought as his predecessors did, but he also further facilitated the strengthening of patriarchy when he offered men ostensibly reasonable justification to domesticate women by linking women’s staying at home with their piety and morality. In *The Philosophy of Right*, Hegel argues that women are not fit to join the public sphere because they lack the attributes of citizenship. He states: ‘If women were to control the government, the state would be in danger, for they do not act according to the dictates of *universality*, but are influenced by accidental inclinations and opinions’ (144, my italics).

Moreover, Hegel famously differentiates between ‘persons’ and ‘individuals’ or ‘subjects’ for, in order for the individual or the subject to be a person and to achieve ‘actuality’ in life, he must be self-conscious and exist for himself in the first place, and then take part in public life. He maintains,

The subject is thus so far a person. It is implied in personality that I, as a distinct being, am on all sides completely bounded and limited, on the side of inner caprice, impulse and appetite, as well as in my direct and visible outer life. But it is implied likewise that I stand in absolutely pure relation to myself. Hence it is that in this finitude I know myself as infinite, universal and free. (52)

It looks very strange to us for a lady to speak in public, but we must remember that in the section of country from which this lady comes, the necessity of self-support bears equally upon women, and crowds them out of domestic life into vocations more congenial to the sterner sex. Happily our domestic institutions, by relieving women of the necessity to labor, protect them in the sacred privacy of home. (197)

This unfair link between woman’s domesticity and her morality reached its culmination in the late nineteenth century with the publication of Coventry Patmore’s long narrative poem *The Angel in the House* between 1854 and 1862. Inspired by his wife Emily, Patmore idealises women as devoted, docile, and domestic. He holds his angel-wife as a model for all women. Just to quote a few lines from the poem:

Her countenance angelical;
The best things that the best believe
Are in her face so kindly writ
The faithless, seeing her, conceive
Not only heaven, but hope of it (39)

Many feminist philosophers and writers, including Woolf—to be discussed later—reacted vehemently against this image of “the angel in the house” in their writings.

In this sense of the person, women are not persons for Hegel. Ironically, although he believes that women are immersed in particularity, they are not conscious of their own particular selves as they live for others rather than for themselves. Therefore, he regards women as mere individuals or subjects who are not suitable for engaging with other persons (men) in the public sphere or universality as he refers to it. He adds:

The abstract will, the will which exists for itself, is a person. The highest aim of man is to be a person, and yet again the mere abstraction “person” is not held in high esteem. Person is essentially different from subject. Subject is only the possibility of personality. Any living thing at all is a subject, while person is a subject which has its subjectivity as an object. As a person I exist for myself. (53)

Women for Hegel do not combine particularity and universality, therefore their place is the private sphere only: ‘The state is real. Its reality consists in its realizing the interest of the whole in particular ends. Actuality is always *the unity of universality and particularity*’ (*Philosophy of Right* 213, my italics).¹⁷

After Hegel, the most influential discourse in this Western liberal tradition on gender and the public/private split is that of John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) who belongs to the same liberal tradition as Kant and Hegel, but generally holds a much more sympathetic position towards women. Mary Lyndon Shanley argues that ‘*The Subjection of Women* was one of the nineteenth century’s strongest pleas for opening to women opportunities for suffrage, education, and employment’ (164). Although there are still some unresolved contradictions in his liberal thinking as he describes women as irrational and prevents them from participating in the political realm, yet Mill provided a glimpse of hope of the eventual liberation of the women of his time. According to Susan Moller Okin in her *Women in Western Political Thought*, ‘[w]hile Mill, exceptionally among political philosophers, tried to treat women as individuals whose happiness and freedom were as important as those of men, his reluctance to question traditional family structure and its intrinsic sex roles prevented him from fully succeeding in his aim’ (237). In his *The Subjection of Women* (1869), he indirectly proposes the idea of allowing women, especially when unmarried, to participate in the public sphere.

¹⁷Hegel’s opinion regarding the public and the private spheres can be summarised in a quotation very similar to Aristotle’s above-mentioned quotation when he refers to the state and the public sphere as the highest authority. This proves the argument that Hegel’s philosophy on this is mainly rooted in Aristotle’s: ‘In contrast with the spheres of private right and private good, of the family and of the civic community, the state is on one of its sides an external necessity. *It is thus a higher authority*, in regard to which the laws and interests of the family and community are subject and dependent. On the other side, however, the state is the indwelling end of these things, and is strong in *its union of the universal end with the particular interests of individuals*’ (*Philosophy of Right* 199, my italics).

He seems to want to refuse the claims that patriarchy normally uses to keep women in the private sphere, but he fails to introduce adequate justifications to refute such normative claims. He writes, for example:

It will be said, perhaps, that the greater nervous susceptibility of women is a disqualification for practice, in anything but domestic life, by rendering them mobile, changeable, too vehemently under the influence of the moment, incapable of dogged perseverance, unequal and uncertain in the power of using their faculties. I think that these phrases sum up the greater part of the objections commonly made to the fitness of women for the higher class of serious business. (70-71)

Mill believes that women must be treated on equal footing with men, but when it comes to the division of labour, he follows the same gendered dualism but apparently without hierarchy. He argues that it is fair enough that the husband earns money and the wife decides how to spend this income on the family: ‘When the support of the family depends, not on property, but on earnings, the common arrangement, by which the man earns the income and the wife superintends the domestic expenditure, seems to me in general the most suitable division of labour between the two persons’ (57). Although Mill’s division of labour (the husband earns, the wife spends) seems unfair for women, if we judge this step from the point of view of women at Mill’s time it will seem a good step towards their emancipation in that, at least he gave them a share in the financial decision making of the family. However, I agree with Shanley when she argues that ‘Mill seemed to shut the door on combining household duties and a public life’ (174). To make the argument more accurate, the phrase “for married women” needs to be added at the end of Shanley’s sentence. Mill defends the rights of women and we can notice a glimpse of hope when he calls for their participation in public life, but when it comes to married women he retreats and follows his predecessors in insisting that housework is the wife’s profession and she is unable to access other professions outside her home because this would mean that: ‘The care which she is herself disabled from taking of the children and the household, nobody else takes’ (*Subjection of Women* 57). Consequently, Mill maintains:

Like a man when he chooses a profession, so, when a woman marries, it may in general be understood that she makes choice of the management of a household, and the bringing up of a family, as the first call upon her exertions, during as many years of her life as may be required for the purpose; and *that she renounces, not all other objects and occupations, but all which are not consistent with the requirements of this*. The actual exercise, in a habitual or systematic manner, of outdoor occupations,

or such as cannot be carried on at home, would by this principle be practically interdicted to the greater number of married women. (58, my italics)

This italicised phrase does not utterly shut the door on married women's participation in the public domain because here Mill argues that even a married woman can hold a public profession on the condition that she does not renounce her domestic duties. It is still a gendered division of domestic labour, but much better than his predecessors' views. Mill agrees to maintain women, especially married women, in domestic life if required, but as equals of men rather than subordinate to them. So, Mill retains the public/private dualism but partially removes the hierarchy. Therefore, Mill's contribution to women's liberation with regard to the public/private dualism is a step in—at least—loosening the knot of this hierarchical chain.

After Mill's somewhat promising contributions towards women's revaluation in the domestic sphere, the most significant discourse to continue this discussion at the same time as challenging its liberal foundation was Marxism and in particular the work of Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Frederick Engels (1820-1895). Appropriating Marx's ideas for feminist thinking has, however, attracted controversy within feminist circles. Some feminists regard Marx as misogynistic; others consider his ideas amenable to feminism. Rather than attempt to address this complex topic here, however, what is most important for this discussion is Marx's attempt to revalue the public/private dualism. Marx, directly and indirectly, made an important attempt to overcome the culture/nature dualism in general and the public/private dualism in particular. Although he did not write directly about the position of women, his ideas on socialism and the division of labour gave feminists important and generative indications that the public/private dualism might be dismantled in their favour. According to Mary O'Brien in her *The Politics of Reproduction*, 'Marx's theory still offers the most promising basis for the critique of male-stream thought, which is the necessary starting point of feminist theory' (160). Heather A. Brown shares the same premise with O'Brien when she states in her *Marx on Gender and the Family: A Critical Study*, that '[a]lthough Marx did not write a great deal on gender and the family, and did not develop a systematic theory of gender, it was for him, nonetheless, an essential category for understanding the division of labour, production, and society in general' (3).

Marx's ideas on the public/private dualism are promising for feminists for two reasons. The first is that Marx, unlike his predecessors, attempts to bridge the gap between the public and the private spheres by employing the concept of 'the social', which is given a

mediating status between the polarised concepts of the political and the individual or the public and the private. Unlike Aristotle and his above-mentioned apostles who adhered to the definition of the public as the political only, Marx believes that 'man' is a political as well as a social being. In his *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'* (1943) Marx asserts that individual and society are one in essence and that the interests, aims and duties of the individual should not in any way be opposed to the interests and aims of society. For Marx, '[t]he actual man is the private man of the present-day political constitution' (82). Also in his 'On the Jewish Question' (1943), Marx argues that the individual's public self and private self should not contradict each other; rather, they must complement each other for the self to be 'complete': 'But it is important to understand where the limit of political emancipation lies. The splitting of man into his *public* and his *private* self [...] is not one step in the process of political emancipation but its *completion*' (222, original italics). For Marx, man is not a generic entity and s/he must not be alienated from herself/himself.

All of the above-discussed philosophers continued to argue that for a man to be important, he must be a citizen; all excluded women from citizenship. Differently from this patriarchal view, Marx believes that the individual is still important even if s/he is not a citizen. He calls for a reformulation of the rights of man to include the rights of the individual self and not only the rights of the citizen in the political sense of the word. He states: 'The first point we should note is that the so-called *rights of man*, as distinct from the *rights of the citizen*, are quite simply the rights of the *member of civil society*, i.e. of egoistic man, of man separated from other men and from the community' ('On the Jewish Question' 229, original italics). He adds, '[t]he right to private property is therefore the right to enjoy and dispose of one's resources as one wills, without regard for other men and independently of society: the right of self-interest' ('On the Jewish Question' 229). For Marx, it will not promote society if individuals renounce their own interests; on the contrary, if they feel secure about themselves and their belongings, they will work well to advance society. Marx maintains, '[t]he concept of security does not enable civil society to rise above its egoism. On the contrary, security is the *guarantee* of its egoism' ('On the Jewish Question' 230, original italics). Unlike the classical tradition which argues that politics is the highest order, Marx gives supremacy to civil or social life over political life. He states that 'political life declares itself to be a mere *means* whose goal is the life of civil society', adding that 'in theory political life is simply the guarantee of the rights of man, the rights of individual man, and should be abandoned as soon as it contradicts its *goal*, these rights of man' ('On the Jewish Question' 231, original italics).

So, although Marx does not talk directly about women here, this idea of the individual as distinct from the citizen gives women importance in themselves even if they are not citizens.

The second reason why Marx appeals to feminists with regard to the public/private dualism emerges from the fact that he values domestic labour and thus turns women from consumers to paid producers. Marx works, although perhaps unintentionally, to politically, socially, and economically revalue women's work in the household, hence giving new importance to the private sphere. His main purpose is attacking capitalism, but he addresses many issues pertaining to the oppression of women under capitalism. Mary O'Brien comments on how capitalism reaches into the private sphere:

Capitalism is, however, something more than a new mode of production creating a new ruling class. It is a new principle of continuity, capable of apparently infinite self-regeneration. This fetishistic property of capital, the apparently magical ability to generate *things*, dehumanizes both reproductive and productive relations ever more radically, generalizing market relations and contracting the private realm incessantly. (160)

Marx is aware that the gendered division of labour in the family is an extension of the series of inequalities in capitalist society. He believes that a classless society cannot exist without ending the gender inequality within the family itself. He states in *The German Ideology* (1846) (co-authored by Fredrick Engels) that 'the natural division of labour in the family and the separation of society into individual families opposed to one another' is a kind of 'latent slavery' where the 'wife and children are the slaves of the husband' (51-52). Therefore, Marx attempts to put an end to the oppression of wives and slaves in the family by giving new value to housework. For him, the woman's work at home is valuable because it indirectly helps promote the economy as women then save men the time and effort required to work in the public sphere. Marx explains in *Capital Volume One* (1867) that '[t]he value of labour-power is determined [...] by the labour-time necessary for the production, and consequently also the reproduction, of this specific article' and that any labour requires the 'maintenance' of the worker which, in its turn, requires 'a certain quantity of the means of subsistence' (274). Therefore, according to Marx, 'the value of labour-power is the value of the means of subsistence necessary for the maintenance of its owner' (274). What Marx indicates here is that the wife's work at home (cooking, cleaning, washing, etc.) is important to sustain the existence and health of the male worker. Therefore, one cannot ignore women's role in the labour force and the time taken to perform housework must be added to the time that the male

worker spends at work in reaching a value. Though unpaid, housework and child care, then, are necessary to produce and maintain the value of labour in the public sphere.

Marx gives another value to housework when he talks about his theory of alienation. Unlike working in the public sphere under capitalism, housework does not involve alienation for women because women are in control of their output. Phillip J. Kain comments on this idea in his 'Marx, Housework, and Alienation':

It should be clear that in doing housework workers would normally be in control of the product or result of their work. In washing dishes or clothes, in cleaning, cooking, sewing, or quilting, the houseworker remains in control of the product or result; certainly these products do not take on an independent, autonomous life of their own, certainly not the way products do on a market. Moreover, houseworkers also remain in control of their own activity in all these tasks, and that activity can be satisfying. Most importantly, housework does not involve alienation from the species. (126)

Marx, then, made good attempts first to blur the boundaries between the public and the private spheres with the mediation of the social between the political and the personal, and second, to revalue domestic labour. However, some feminists argue that Marx's writings are an extension of the patriarchal tradition of oppressing women. In her 'Masculine Marx' Christine Di Stefano takes a critical approach to Marx's writings in relation to women. She argues that Marx fails to 'acknowledge and theorize reproductive and caring labor' in his works and that he follows the received patriarchal view of the sexualised division of labour, relegating women to the realm of necessity (153). I partially agree with Di Stefano. As elaborated above, regarding the positive side of Marx's thinking with regard to the public/private dualism, it is evident that sometimes Marx is not consistent in his opinions, especially in his later works. For example, in his posthumous work *Capital Volume Three* (1894), Marx expresses a disappointing opinion for feminists when he polarises the public and the private spheres as the realm of freedom and the realm of necessity respectively. Here he claims that 'the realm of freedom actually begins only where labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases' and he places the 'civilised man' above 'Nature', arguing that man must 'wrestle with Nature to satisfy his wants' (Chapter 48). However, this might be regarded as a momentary lapse in Marx's thinking because most of his writings promise positive benefit for women, even if not necessarily always consciously intended.

Early Feminist Conceptualisation of the Public/Private Dualism:

Keeping in mind all these negative constructions of the private sphere, not surprisingly, early feminists set out to reject almost everything identified as pertaining to the private realm. They believed that in order to achieve equality with men, women would have to detach themselves from the realm of domesticity and exist in the public arena. According to Landes, '[f]ar from being a platform for personal fulfilment, in feminist writings the private sphere first figured as a site for sexual inequality, unremunerated work, and seething discontent' (1). Therefore, the first right sought by early feminists was that of the vote. Voting was essential for early feminists—specifically suffragists—because they were still influenced by the classical tradition which equates the public sphere with politics, as explained above. Those early suffragists were quite aware that they could not acquire their rights without defining themselves as citizens—a label of which they were deprived for so long. As a result, as Mary Dietz explains in her 'Citizenship with a Feminist Face', those early feminists 'all shared at least one common task: to desanctify the family and demystify motherhood' (45) because, in their view, it was their biology which confined them to the domestic sphere. Carole Pateman comments on this in her 'Feminist Critiques of the Public/Private Dichotomy'. According to Pateman, '[t]he long struggle to enfranchise women is one of the most important theoretical and practical examples of feminist attacks on the dichotomy between the private and the public' (290).

To place the arguments of the early feminists in the context of Derrida's theory of deconstruction—the main theory which governs my critique of all dualisms—is again surely to discover that this early feminist position is typical of the first stage of Derrida's two-stage process of deconstruction; that is, one which focuses mostly on inverting the terms of the dualism. In this context, what these early feminists did was to invert the public/private dualism without deconstructing and therefore disabling the force of the dualism itself. I agree with Pateman that many 'accepted the doctrine of separate spheres,' and worked to extend their freedom via the slogan 'separate but equal' (290). Looking over this tradition of thinking is to recognise immediately many of the same voices examined in Chapter One in the consideration of feminist critiques of women's relation with nature. But examined from the perspective of the public/private dualism, further nuances become apparent.

1- Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797):

One of the early feminists who occupies a key role in attacking the public/private dualism is again Mary Wollstonecraft. Dorothy McBride Stetson argues that:

Mary Wollstonecraft's political theory is solidly in the liberal tradition; essential to that tradition is the public/private dichotomy. However, her work in vindicating the rights of woman directly confronted and bridged that dichotomy. Throughout Wollstonecraft's writing she integrates her treatment of government and public matters with views of family and private concerns. (171)

Wollstonecraft was a contemporary of both Kant and Hegel. She was highly influenced by their patriarchal liberal tradition which deprived women of rationality, and hence of citizenship, education, and anything pertaining to the public sphere. According to Moira Gatens, '[r]eason and feeling is the governing dichotomy and the source of the major conflicts in Mary Wollstonecraft's work and in her life' (112). In order to prove that women are suitable for the public sphere, Wollstonecraft inverted the public/private dualism and rejected all the attributes of domesticity such as housework, motherhood, and child rearing. She explains in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*:

[S]peaking of women at large, their first duty is to themselves as *rational creatures*, and the next, in point of importance, as *citizens*, is that, which includes so many, of a mother. The rank in life which dispenses with their fulfilling this duty, necessarily *degrades them* by making them mere dolls. Or, should they turn to something more important than merely fitting drapery upon a smooth block, their minds are only occupied by some soft platonic attachment; or, the actual management of an intrigue may keep their thoughts in motion; for when they neglect domestic duties, they have it not in their power to take the field and march and counter-march like soldiers, or wrangle in the senate to keep their faculties from rusting' (175, my italics).

Wollstonecraft believes that educating women is the first stepping stone which allows them to enter the public sphere: '[M]ake women rational creatures, and free citizens, and *they will quickly become good wives, and mothers*; that is—if men do not neglect the duties of husbands and fathers' (209, my italics). This italicised phrase brings us back to Gayatri Spivak's major concept of "strategic essentialism" discussed earlier. Wollstonecraft here uses this tactic of strategic essentialism when she promotes the essentialisation of women's roles in order for women to gain proper rights. She tries to convince men to allow women to be educated in order to return to the private sphere as more cultured and educated wives and mothers. Although it is evident from Wollstonecraft's ideas that becoming a wife and mother was not one of her priorities in life, still she wants to essentialise this idea in order to foreground women's problems and end their marginality.

Part of Wollstonecraft's attempt to invert the public/private dualism is not only to place women in the public sphere, but similarly to place men in the private sphere. She says

to men: '[I]f you wish to make good citizens, you must first exercise the affections of a son and a brother. This is the only way to expand the heart; for public affections, as well as public virtues, must ever grow out of the private character' (193). This is actually an attempt by Wollstonecraft to bridge the gap between the public and the private spheres by urging men to be more related to the private sphere, to attend more to the duties of the family and from this to shape the feelings and virtues of a good citizen. She grounds her contention on moral reasons in order to convince men: '[V]irtue is only a nominal distinction when the duties of citizens, husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, and directors of families, become merely the selfish ties of convenience. Why then do philosophers look for public spirit? Public spirit must be nurtured by private virtue' (169). Wollstonecraft stresses the idea that the family is a prototype and a microcosm of the state, and therefore, all the members of the family must be satisfied in order for the state to be good.

All these attempts from Wollstonecraft were significant steps in attacking the public/private dualism, especially in this early stage in the eighteenth century; yet, her attempts were not completely fruitful because of her tendency to believe that all of women's problems stem from biology, as Gatens states:

The great difficulty confronting Wollstonecraft in her attempt to resolve the moral and political disjunction between the (female) private sphere and the (male) public sphere is worsened by her acceptance of the idea that it is nature rather than social organization that requires women to assume the responsibility for childcare and home maintenance' (122).

But this does not negate the fact that Wollstonecraft's position was a crucial step in deconstructing the public/private dualism and that following feminists built much on her ideas.

2- Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935):

Another prominent early feminist figure who helped blur the boundaries between the public and the private spheres is American sociologist and writer Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Gilman's ideas were daring and often ahead of their time. In her 'How Home Conditions React Upon the Family' (1909), almost four decades before Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Gilman posited that it is the social structure rather than nature which is the cause of women's oppression: 'There is nothing in maternity, nothing in the natural relation of the sexes which should make the female the servant of the male' (593). She believes that women live in an androcentric culture which tries to oppress them by all means. In her 'The Man-

Made World; or, Our Androcentric Culture', Gilman argues that women have taken for granted 'that "mankind" meant men-kind, and the world was theirs' (17-18). Gilman assigns a great part of her non-fiction writings to the question of how to cross the boundaries between the public and the private spheres in an attempt to end women's confinement in the domestic sphere by trying to re-define the concept and the structure of the home itself. In Gilman's view, there should not be a 'man's sphere' and a 'woman's sphere' as they both should share a common sphere of 'humanity' (24).¹⁸ She critiques the polarisation of the public/private spheres that is gendered so as to allow men to monopolise public activities and imprison women in the domestic sphere. She calls for a "human" and "unsexed" way of distributing activities. In 'How to Lighten the Labor of Women' (1912), Gilman maintains that women's work at home does not contradict her working outside the home in the same way that man's work in the public sphere does not contradict his being a father in the family. She postulates that:

The private home must remain, with the family living and loving therein, but this does not mean with all the family working therein all the time. The "man of the house" is part of the family, surely; he loves and enjoys his home, but he does not have to stay in it continually. The children may spend practically all day at school, without losing either home or family. So, even the "lady of the house" will not cease to be part of the family, nor to love and enjoy her home, if she goes out of it for part of the time. (14)

Whether she was directly engaged with Marx's writings or not, Gilman follows Marx's idea that women's work inside the home should be paid, otherwise it will be a waste of time and will affect the economy badly. She argues that '[b]ecause we do not pay women for their work in the home, we think we are getting it done cheaply. Women--and men, too--think that the cheapest way to live is for each man to have *one whole woman* to cook for him. No matter how poor he is, he has his private servant' ('How to Lighten' 15). In an echo of Marx's view of the value of domestic labour, Gilman explains in a practical and material way that:

Economy in labor is not merely a matter of wages: it is in the amount of labor used to do a given thing. If a hundred men have a hundred women to cook for them, for nothing apiece, it is not economy, it is waste. It is *waste of labor*, of all the labor over

¹⁸Gilman maintains that: 'To the man, the whole world was his world; his because he was male; and the whole world of woman was the home; because she was female. She had her prescribed sphere, strictly limited to her feminine occupations and interests; he had all the rest of life; and not only so, but, having it, insisted on calling it male.[...] As a matter of fact, there is a "woman's sphere," sharply defined and quite different from his; there is also a "man's sphere," as sharply defined and even more limited; but there remains a common sphere—that of humanity, which belongs to both alike. In the earlier part of what is known as "the woman's movement," it was sharply opposed on the ground that women would become "unsexed"' ('The Man-Made World' 23-24).

and above what would be necessary to do that cooking. Six women, in an eight-hour day, with proper conveniences, could do the cooking for that two hundred persons. So with the laundry work the sweeping, dusting, scrubbing, sewing--all the manifold labors known as housework. ('How to Lighten'15)

This call for paying for women's domestic labour, here combined with collective efficiency, is a good step in re-defining women's place in the house as active workers rather than mere consumers. This, consequently, defines women in the public arena as active citizens.

Gilman goes further to re-define the concept of home itself as a crucial step towards re-defining women's place in it. In *The Home: Its Work and Influence* (1903), she points out that the home is simply a human institution which is liable to improvement.¹⁹ According to Gilman, there are some myths—long-connected with the home—that need to be removed in order to improve women's status in society. Examples of those deep-rooted myths are “the privacy”, “the sanctity” and the “economy” of the home. When she explains the myth of the economy of the home, Gilman states: ‘The man is to earn, and the woman to save, to expend judiciously, to administer the products of labour to the best advantage (*The Home* 51). She believes that women must be economically independent in order to be emancipated. This idea of the financial independence of women serves as a prelude to Virginia Woolf's challenge to the public/private dichotomy in *A Room of One's Own* as will be examined below.

3- Virginia Woolf (1882-1941):

Throughout both her philosophical and literary writings, Woolf seems to be conscious of the importance of space and its relation to gender. In their ‘Introduction’ to *Locating Woolf: The Politics of Space and Place*, Anna Snaith and Michael H. Whitworth argue that ‘From questions of women's relationship to national space in *Three Guineas*, to intellectual space in *A Room of One's Own*, to artistic space in *To the Lighthouse*, it was through discourses of space that Woolf articulated the exclusions and boundaries that regulated women's bodies and minds’ (2). Helen Southworth also points out that ‘[i]n the work of Virginia Woolf space and gender are concepts that are inextricably bound together.

¹⁹ She contends that: ‘The home is a human institution. All human institutions are open to improvement. This specially dear and ancient one, however, we have successfully kept shut, and so it has not improved as have some others. The home is too important a factor in human life to be thus left behind in the march of events; its influence is too wide, too deep, too general, for us to ignore. Whatever else a human being has to meet and bear, he has always the home as a governing factor in the formation of character and the direction of life’ (4).

Space provides a vehicle for questions about gender, about the inclusion of one sex and the exclusion of the other, and about the access of each to power' (46).²⁰

In *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Woolf re-defines the concept of the private or the personal for women as configuring a place of empowerment rather than one simply of entrapment, passivity and docility. She believes that 'a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction' (7). Woolf uses the word 'room' both literally and metaphorically to mean a space of privacy for women. In her *A Literature of Their Own*, Elaine Showalter critiques Woolf for inviting women to have a room of their own. She claims that Woolf 'was advocating a strategic retreat, and not a victory; a denial of feeling, and not a mastery of it' (285). She adds that the room here 'is a symbol of psychic withdrawal, an escape from the demands of other people' (286). Contrary to Showalter's claim, I believe that the concept of the room for Woolf is invigorating and liberating to women rather than restraining and suffocating. Woolf believes that a woman cannot know reality without knowing her particular self first. This is suggested when she addresses women: '[W]hen I ask you to earn money and have a room of your own, I am asking you to live in the presence of reality, an invigorating life, it would appear, whether one can impart it or not' (*A Room* 119). Looking ahead, this kind of knowledge of one's own self proves to be effective in Celie's self-realisation as a means to gain agency in *The Color Purple*. Though there is no evidence that Woolf read Hegel, her perspective here may even be read as a reaction to the kind of claim that Hegel makes that a woman is not a person because although she is immersed in particularity, she does not know her particular self.

Woolf here employs the room or the private sphere strategically as the first step in a woman's venture into the world. If women are required to remain in the private sphere, at least for the time being, she invites them to use this situation positively in order to educate themselves and look into their inner selves to know reality, rather than being simply passive and docile. Julie Robin Solomon astutely observes:

[I]n *A Room* the notion of "the room" serves as a potent political metaphor for women because it concretizes visually, tactilely, the politicization of the personal and the personalization of the political. The achieving of personal space in *A Room*, as opposed to simple place within someone else's framework, makes woman into a respected citizen, constitutes her as a political subject. (331-332)

²⁰There is significant literature on the concepts of place and space in Virginia Woolf's writings. See for example Anna Snaith's *Virginia Woolf: Public and Private Negotiations* (2000) and Melba Cuddy-Keane's *Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual and the Public Sphere* (2003). Most of the literature written on Woolf regarding this aspect focuses on how she employs space in her literary writings. It is not my focus here to discuss Woolf's literary works, but I will examine her conceptualisation of the public/private dualism as a feminist philosopher.

Here Woolf is reacting against the image of ‘the angel in the house,’ which was explained in detail above. In her ‘Professions for Women’—a speech to the Women’s Service League—gathered posthumously in her *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays* (1942), Woolf went on to describe the angel in the house:

She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it— in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all—I need not say it—she was pure. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty—her blushes, her great grace. (150)

These are the ideal characteristics of the upper and middle class woman who was confined to the private sphere at that time. Woolf does not want women to be private in this sense; she invites them to kill the angel in the house as she did in order to find a writing career for herself:

I discovered that if I were going to review books I should need to do battle with a certain phantom. And the phantom was a woman, and when I came to know her better I called her after the heroine of a famous poem, The Angel in the House. It was she who used to come between me and my paper when I was writing reviews. It was she who bothered me and wasted my time and so tormented me that at last I killed her. You who come of a younger and happier generation [...] may not know what I mean by the Angel in the House’ (‘Professions for Women’ 150).

Woolf not only re-defines the private sphere as a realm of growth and empowerment for women, but she also attempts to bridge the gap between the public and the private spheres. In her *Three Guineas* (1938)—which can be regarded as a sequel to *A Room of One’s Own* although it was published nine years after it—she suggests that ‘the public and the private worlds are inseparably connected’ (162). In Solomon’s view,

whereas in *A Room* Woolf viewed the above steps as ends in themselves, she now considers them tactics for strengthening women’s subversion of patriarchal institutions. Thus, though Woolf still calls for the necessity of having a “room of one’s own,” in *Three Guineas* the acquisition of space, place, and capital is not a mark of conformity, but rather the base from which to launch oppositional tactics. (341)

I agree with Solomon’s view that Woolf’s acceptance of the private sphere—in its new sense—was strategic and tactical. In *Three Guineas*, she argues that without mastering the

private sphere, especially the inner self, women will not be able to find a place in the public sphere. She points out that ‘it is so important to accustom ourselves to the duties of free speech, for without private there can be no public freedom, that we must try to uncover this fear and to face it’ (*Three Guineas* 138). Woolf unknowingly, and working in a broadly liberal as well as socialist tradition of political thinking, though radicalising it for her own purposes, is calling for an early form of consciousness-raising. Towards the end of *Three Guineas*, with a reflective sense of the war, Woolf also and even pre-emptively makes it clear that she rejects the polarisation of the public and the private spheres:

A common interest unites us; it is one world, one life. How essential it is that we should realize that unity the dead bodies, the ruined houses prove. For such will be our ruin if you, in the immensity of your public abstractions forget the private figure, or if we in the intensity of our private emotions forget the public world. Both houses will be ruined, the public and the private, the material and the spiritual, for they are inseparably connected. (163)

4- Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986):

Simone de Beauvoir is a subsequent key theorist of a gendered anatomy of the public and the private, a focus arising not only from her prominence as a feminist philosopher, but also because, with the publication of her groundbreaking book, *The Second Sex* (1949), she laid the foundation for second-wave feminism. Where first-wave feminism was concerned with women’s suffrage and legal rights, the second wave broadened these concerns to include sexuality, family, and reproduction. Beauvoir’s understanding of the public/private dualism is an extension to her view of the transcendence/immanence dualism discussed in Chapter One of this thesis. She believes that it is woman’s immanent nature—which was forced upon her by patriarchy—which confines her to the domestic sphere. For Beauvoir, keeping women exclusively in the private sphere is part of their othering. She points out:

The men of today show a certain duplicity of attitude which is painfully lacerating to women; they are willing on the whole to accept woman as a fellow being, an equal; but they still require her to remain the inessential. For her these two destinies are incompatible; *she hesitates between one and the other without being exactly adapted to either, and from this comes her lack of equilibrium. With man there is no break between public and private life: the more he confirms his grasp on the world in action and in work, the more virile he seems to be; human and vital values are combined in him. Whereas woman’s independent successes are in contradiction with her*

femininity, since the ‘true woman’ is required to make herself object, to be the Other.
(268, my italics)

Here Beauvoir is influenced by the patriarchal classical tradition in polarising the public/private dualism. She wants to achieve equality between men and women, but she finds this impossible for women if they still hesitate to reject their conventional femininity. According to Beauvoir, man can succeed in the public realm because he does not experience a contradiction between his self in the public sphere and his self in the private sphere; whereas woman suffers contradiction between the dictates of her body—which confine her to the domestic sphere—and the demands of the public sphere. Therefore, the solution for this duality in Beauvoir’s view is that the woman should forget her femininity and its dictates, such as motherhood, child-rearing, and housework, if she is to succeed in the public sphere. She states: ‘What woman essentially lacks today for doing great things is *forgetfulness of herself*; but to forget oneself it is first of all necessary to be firmly assured that now and for the future one has found oneself’ (661, my italics).

This ‘forgetfulness of the self’ brings us to an important idea in Beauvoir’s thought. Beauvoir famously distinguishes between ‘life’ and ‘existence’. She maintains:

On the biological level a species is maintained only by creating itself anew; but this creation results only in repeating the same Life in more individuals. But man assures the repetition of Life while transcending Life through Existence; by this transcendence he creates values that deprive pure repetition of all value. (89).

Life for Beauvoir is animal or biological existence that is embedded in effect in Kant’s realm of necessity. Beauvoir defines existence, therefore, as ‘transcending itself towards the world and towards the future’ (63). She argues that engaging in domestic activities, especially those around maternity, ‘dooms woman to a sedentary existence’ and renders her inactive, unable to transcend (94). She explains:

The woman who gave birth, therefore, did not know the pride of creation; she felt herself the plaything of obscure forces, and the painful ordeal of childbirth seemed a useless or even troublesome accident. But in any case giving birth and suckling are not *activities*, they are natural functions; no project is involved; and that is why woman found in them no reason for a lofty affirmation of her existence - she submitted passively to her biologic fate. The domestic labours that fell to her lot because they were reconcilable with the cares of maternity imprisoned her in repetition and immanence; they were repeated from day to day in an identical form,

which was perpetuated almost without change from century to century; they produced nothing new' (88, original italics)

According to Beauvoir, in this system it is man who is 'involved in undertaking an authentic existence' (20). He is an existent, not merely a living being: 'In this activity he put his power to the test; he set up goals and opened up roads towards them; in brief, he found self-realization as *an existent*. To maintain, he created; he burst out of the present, he opened the future' (89, my italics). She further argues that 'the male sex life is normally integrated with his individual existence: in desire and in coition his transcendence towards the species is at one with his subjectivity - he *is* his body' (54, original italics). This moving from life to existence, in Beauvoir's account, in order to find one's individual self is reworked in Robinson's portrayal of Sylvie and Lila as achieving self, in *Housekeeping* and *Lila*, as will be examined below.

Moreover, Beauvoir goes along with the patriarchal view of the gendered division of labour, albeit with different intentions. She believes that work inside the house is feminine while work in the public arena is masculine. She urges women to renounce such domestic work in order to assimilate 'into our once *masculine society*' (148, my italics). She follows Aristotle, Kant, and Hegel in claiming that as long as the woman is confined to the private sphere, she is not a citizen. She believes that man 'is first a citizen, a producer, secondly a husband; she is before all, and often exclusively, a wife; her work does not take her out of her situation' (434). Beauvoir speaks lightly about women's domestic work in comparison to men's 'projects' in the public sphere when she argues, '[i]t is impossible simply to equate gestation with a *task*, a piece of work, or with a *service*, such as military service. Woman's life is more seriously broken in upon by a demand for children than by regulation of the citizen's employment' (84, original italics). It is important to note that Beauvoir does not renounce domestic responsibilities for intrinsic reasons; but she opposes and even despises them because patriarchal society forces them on women only. As she contends:

Marriage is obscene in principle in so far as it transforms into rights and duties those mutual relations which should be founded on a spontaneous urge; it gives an instrumental and therefore degrading character to the two bodies in dooming them to know each other in their general aspect *as* bodies, not as persons (432).

In Beauvoir's understanding, housework and child care can be meaningful, satisfying, and enjoyable for women if they are chosen and also shared by men. But if they are expected of a woman only, if they are regarded as her gendered duty, if she is forced into doing them, then they become slavish and oppressive. The last phrase in the above quotation is important: 'as

bodies, not as persons'. Beauvoir here echoes the above-mentioned patriarchal Hegelian idea of regarding women as mere individuals rather than persons. She believes that as long as domestic duties are the destiny of women only, women are constituted as incomplete persons. She states: 'It would clearly be desirable for the good of the child if the mother were a complete, unmutated person, a woman finding in her work and in her relation to society a self-realization that she would not seek to attain tyrannically through her offspring' (502).

Thus, for Beauvoir, reconciling the public and the private spheres is essential for women to be complete persons and active citizens; yet, unfortunately, she makes no effective attempt to reconcile them because she was still writing within philosophical paradigms shaped by patriarchal philosophers' opinions about women. However, with her influential opinion that it is society rather than biology which is the main source of women's oppression, Simone de Beauvoir opened up new possibilities for women that gave rise to the movement of second-wave feminism.

The Personal is Political:

Beauvoir's influential sentence: 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' (273), was the rallying cry that helped propel the momentum for second-wave feminism. At this stage of feminism—which began in the 1960s—Western women had obtained, at least in part, some of the rights demanded by first wave feminists: the right to vote and education; they now started to raise further family-related issues around division of work, reproduction, sexuality, and family relations. Perhaps these rights were not gained everywhere by the 1960s and even in Europe they varied considerably, but Beauvoir's words encouraged feminists to think that the main cause of their personal problems lay in an unequal social and political structure. Therefore, "the personal is political" became the slogan of this stage of women's liberation. The catchphrase—which has been described as a defining characterisation of second-wave feminism—was recognised by the publication of an essay by feminist activist Carol Hanisch under the title 'The Personal is Political' in *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation in 1969*.²¹ Hanisch does not use the phrase "the personal is political" in the essay but writes: 'One of the first things we discover in these groups is that *personal*

²¹Charles Wright Mills' book *The Sociological Imagination* (1959) might also be seen as a prelude to this slogan. In his book, American sociologist Mills argues that there is intersection between the private and public problems. He postulates, 'problems are formulated in such a way that their very statement incorporates a number of specific milieux and the private troubles encountered there by a variety of individuals; these milieux, in turn, are located in terms of larger historical and social structures' (129). Yet, Hanisch is still regarded as the first theorist to bring this slogan to attention in feminist circles.

problems are political problems. There are no personal solutions at this time. There is only collective action for a collective solution' (No Pagination). As Hanisch herself clarifies in an introduction to a reprint of this essay in 2006: 'I'd like to clarify for the record that I did not give the paper its title, "The Personal Is Political." As far as I know, that was done by *Notes from the Second Year* editors Shulie Firestone and Anne Koedt' (No Pagination). By this slogan Hanisch implies that women's personal problems stem from the structure of society, so they need to be tackled collectively in women's organisations and not simply by individuals.

Raising the slogan "the personal is political", second-wave feminists effectively endorsed and deepened the first-wave critique of the public/private dualism. In her 'Justice from Sphere to Sphere: Challenging the Public/Domestic Dichotomy', Susan Moller Okin argues that "[t]he personal is political" is the central message of feminist critiques of the public/domestic dichotomy' (Okin 124). Second-wave feminists believe that the notion of "separate spheres" is an ideological construct because power relationships are not limited to the institutions of the public sphere, but exist in all aspects of life, including the private—even sexual—relationships between men and women.²² Okin comments on the necessity of deconstructing the public/private dualism because the power structures and struggles identified within the political discourse also govern family relations:

[W]hat happens in domestic and personal life is not immune from the dynamic of power, which has typically been seen as the distinguishing feature of the political. Power within the family, whether that of husband over wife or of parent over child, has often not been recognized as such, either because it has been regarded as natural or because it is assumed that, in the family, altruism and the harmony of interests make power an insignificant factor. (128)

Thus, the politicisation of the private sphere by second-wave feminists of the 1960s and 1970s was a crucial step in beginning to challenge and deconstruct the public/private dualism. Early second wave feminists began to re-define the political to include intimate and personal issues and not only historical and traditionally political public problems. Yet, we cannot say that 'the personal is political' campaign was completely successful in breaking down the public/private dualism because second-wave feminists, especially consciousness-raising activists, went to extremes to renounce anything related to the private sphere and they politicised everything to a degree that removed any good distinction between the public and

²²See for example Nancy Fraser in *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*, Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics*, and Shulamith Firestone in *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*.

the private spheres.²³ Okin persuasively argues that '[c]hallenging the dichotomy does not necessarily mean denying the usefulness of a concept of privacy or the value of privacy itself in human life. Nor does it mean denying that there are *any* reasonable distinctions to be made between the public and domestic spheres' (127). Theresa Man Ling Lee shares this view in her 'Rethinking the Personal and the Political: Feminist Activism and Civic Engagement' when she cautions against a total overlap between the two spheres as some radical feminists advocate because, according to her,

the politicization of one's personal life opens the possibility to see one's most intimate relations as relations of power in which the appropriate response is resistance rather than attachment. Distrust rather than trust will likely be the order of the day. Life under such a condition is bound to be unpleasant. (167)

Therefore, there was a need to not only deconstruct the public/private dualism, but also to re-construct it in a different way by giving new meanings to the terms of the dualisms themselves. This is what ecofeminists have managed to do to a greater extent as will be exemplified in the following section.

Ecofeminism and Blurring the Boundaries Between the Public Sphere and the Private Sphere: Literary Explorations in the Writings of Alice Walker and Marilynne Robinson

In her 'Ecofeminism: Linking Theory and Practice', ecofeminist Janis Birkeland contends that the 'dualistic conceptual framework of Patriarchy supports the ethic of dominance and divides us against each other, our "selves," and nonhuman nature' (20). In response to the second-wave motto of "the personal is political", she postulates that '[w]e must change the ideology that says the morality of the (female) private sphere has no application to the (male) public sphere of science, politics, and industry. We must work to *rebalance* the masculine and feminine in ourselves and society' (20, my italics). Indeed, it is this compulsion to 'rebalance' the public and the private that distinguishes ecofeminists from second-wave feminists with regard to their respective conceptualisations of the public/private dualism. As stated above, when second-wave feminists applied the slogan "the personal is political" in their lives, some went to extremes in their politicisation of their private lives, and repudiating and effectively trying to evacuate the domestic as a significant dimension in their lives. This section will begin the consideration of ways in which recent and contemporary

²³This will be the case in Alice Walker's *Meridian* as will be analysed in the following section of the chapter.

American women's literary writing has continued to speak to and variously engage with these dominant traditions of political thinking, concerning relations between the public and the private. How do Alice Walker and Marilynne Robinson conceptualise women's place in the public and the private spheres; how do they attempt to effect a 'rebalance' between the public and the private spheres to subvert traditional dualisms? Although Walker and Robinson are contemporaries of each other, and although their narratives belong to the American tradition, any analysis must also consider the differences between their purposes for breaking out of the public/private dualism.

The American Cult of True Womanhood:

One cannot ignore 'the cult of true womanhood' which prevailed in the US at almost the same moment as the reinforced call for the domesticity of women as a sign of their morality in Britain, especially that this 'cult of true womanhood' will inform my reading of Walker's and Robinson's fiction in the following section. According to the American paradigm of true womanhood in the nineteenth century, a true woman is again a woman at home. In her 'The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860', Barbara Welter explores the attributes of a True Woman according to this ideal:

The attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors and society could be divided into four cardinal virtues—piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. Put them all together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife—woman. Without them, no matter whether there was fame, achievement or wealth, all was ashes. With them she was promised happiness and power. (152)

These attributes of true womanhood were made popular in magazines, religious teachings, and literature. Even literature by American women consolidated this restrictive definition of women's piety as being both moral domestic. In her famous work *A Treatise on Domestic Economy: For the Use of Young Ladies at Home and at School* (1845), Catherine Beecher—Harriet Beecher Stowe's sister—laid the ground for women's domesticity but she added another dimension to women's staying at home. According to Beecher, by staying in the domestic sphere women are also active agents because they bring up good citizens that help develop the country. She states:

It is equally conceded, that the formation of the moral and intellectual character of the young is committed mainly to the female hand. The mother forms the character of the future man; the sister bends the fibres that are hereafter to be the forest tree; the wife

sways the heart, whose energies may turn for good or for evil the destinies of a nation. Let the women of a country be made virtuous and intelligent, and the men will certainly be the same. The proper education of a man decides the welfare of an individual; but educate a woman, and the interests of a whole family are secured. (37)

Beecher follows the same patriarchal view as Aristotle and other patriarchal philosophers when she maintains that a relation of subordination must govern the relationship between men and women in society:

For this purpose, it is needful that certain relations be sustained, which involve the duties of subordination. There must be the magistrate and the subject, one of whom is the superior, and the other the inferior. There must be the relations of husband and wife, parent and child, teacher and pupil, employer and employed, each involving the relative duties of subordination. The superior, in certain particulars, is to direct, and the inferior is to yield obedience. Society could never go forward, harmoniously, nor could any craft or profession be successfully pursued, unless these superior and subordinate relations be instituted and sustained. (26)

It is significant that this idea of the pursuit of true womanhood was mainly aimed at upper and middle class American women in the nineteenth century. Working class women and black American women were excluded from this cult of the domestic angel either because they were not regarded as 'women' in the mainstream definition of the word, or because economics dictated that they work outside the home. This issue is explored in the literature of nineteenth-century black American women writers. It was Sojourner Truth's famous speech 'Ain't I a Woman?', which she delivered at the Woman's Rights Convention in Ohio in 1851, that triggered the critique of the exclusion of black women's issues from any discussion about women. The illiterate lecturer, Abolitionist and equal-rights activist Sojourner Truth (1797-1883) asked a friend from the Northampton Association, Olive Gilbert, to transcribe her life story and it was published in 1850 as *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth*. This narrative inspired women writers to write anti-slavery literature such as the white American writer and reformer Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896) in her *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), and also the black American writer Harriet Jacobs (1813-1897) in her *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), in which she, like Truth, narrates her life story as a female slave. One of the major sources of pressure on later twentieth century movement for women's liberation, taken up by postmodern and third-wave feminist critics, was the belated recognition of these nineteenth century narratives and the need to address fully and to recognise the differences between white American and black American women's experiences,

especially with regard to the conceptions of the public and private spheres. In her *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (1982), bell hooks puts forth this issue, maintaining:

In most of their writing, the white American woman's experience is made synonymous with the American woman's experience. While it is in no way racist for any author to write a book exclusively about white women, it is fundamentally racist for books to be published that focus solely on the American white woman's experience in which that experience is assumed to be the American woman's experience. (137)

As a black American woman who suffered from slavery's negative consequences for the lives of black people in spite of not witnessing slavery firsthand, Alice Walker's narratives pinpoint the fact that the public/private dualism is not only gendered, but racialised as well. Brigitte Bargetz stresses the Eurocentric bias behind the public/private dualism, contending that '[d]ue to its androcentric and Eurocentric assumptions, the concept of public/private has been criticized for ignoring and making invisible certain power relations' (No Pagination). In her *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins investigates black women's work as organised within intersecting oppressions of race, class, and gender. She discusses how many black American families deviate from the traditional American family ideal concerning the public and the private spheres:

In general, everything the imagined traditional family ideal is thought to be, African-American families are not. Two elements of the traditional family ideal are especially problematic for African-American women. First, the assumed split between the "public" sphere of paid employment and the "private" sphere of unpaid family responsibilities has never worked for U.S. Black women. Under slavery, U.S. Black women worked without pay in the allegedly public sphere of Southern agriculture and had their family *privacy* routinely violated. Second, the public/private binary separating the family households from the paid labor market is fundamental in explaining U.S. gender ideology. If one assumes that real men work and real women take care of families, then African-Americans suffer from deficient ideas concerning gender. In particular, Black women become less "feminine," because they work outside the home, work for pay and thus compete with men, and their work takes them away from their children. (47, my italics)

Indeed, the public and the private spheres have entirely different conceptions for many black American women, and this was especially the case under slavery. Under slavery the two spheres were conflated in ways that were particularly oppressive for women. Black American women worked as slaves and servants in white houses, as sharecroppers, and as lowly-paid

workers in factories. Although they were always working in the public sphere that European and white American women were aspiring to access, the public sphere was effectively a prison for them. It was never the space of liberation envisaged by European and white American feminist thinkers. Black women worked without payment or with such meagre payment that it was never enough to sustain their families. Unlike the “cult of domesticity” and the image of “the angel in the house” that middle class European and white American women were reacting against, remaining in their “private” houses was a dream for many black American women. Here the word “private” not only refers to the sphere of the domestic, more importantly, for black American women, it meant having a sense of privacy, safety, and individuation which they lacked, whether they remained slaves or were servants in white American houses, especially in the South, after US slavery was abolished in 1865. The private sphere in this positive sense was something to aspire to and for many black women would have been associated with gains in liberty, with them finally being allowed both a secure family life and economic self-support. It was not until the surge of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s that the public sphere began to be regarded as a potentially liberating sphere for black American women, as is the case with Walker’s character Meridian in her novel of the same name. It was only in this decade that they started to access the public sphere as active citizens, voters, and sometimes well-paid workers across the nation.

This racialised context of the public/private dualism is not to the fore, however, in Marilynne Robinson’s conception of the dualism. Indeed, it demonstrates how no writer can be separated from his/her social, cultural, educational, and political background. As one whose mind has been nourished on theology and religious practice, Robinson from the first conceives of the public and the private spheres mainly from a religious point of view. As will be explored below, her main argument in *Lila* is to redefine the wilderness from being a place of evil and fear into being a place where one can feel the existence of God. In reconceptualising the wilderness as an extension of the private sphere, Robinson is also reacting against the male-dominated cultural legacy which excluded women from venturing into the wilderness. Thus, as a consequence of their different social and cultural backgrounds, Walker and Robinson pursue different purposes in their deconstruction of the public/private dualism. The common ground between them, however, is their ecofeminist stance, one which forces them to reject *all* kinds of dualisms. As I will explore, they are also similar in their call for a spiritual relationship with nature as a way to overcome duality, playing these ideas out in their fictional representations as well as addressing them in their non-fiction.

The Deconstruction of the Public/Private Dualism in Alice Walker's Fiction: Re-defining the Public Sphere in *The Color Purple*:

Alice Walker brilliantly delineates the intersection of race, class, and gender in her conceptualisation of the public/private dualism in *The Color Purple* (1982) and *Meridian* (1976). I will discuss *The Color Purple* first—although it was written six years after *Meridian*—because the time setting of its incidents spans the period from 1900 to 1940, whereas *Meridian*'s incidents are set mainly in the 1960s. *The Color Purple* was discussed in the previous chapter with regard to the transcendence/immanence dualism with some focus on Walker's call for women's spiritual relationship with the world to blur the boundaries between transcendence and immanence. This chapter analyses the novel as Celie's journey from being merely a housewife shut in the domestic sphere to being a whole woman who creates a balance between her existence in the public and the private spheres because of her reinvigorated relationship with nature. It is significant that Celie's journey is mainly spiritual and that, in Walker's thinking, had she not managed to deconstruct the transcendence/immanence dualism and reconstruct her relationship with the two terms, she would never have been able to deconstruct the public/private dualism.

As a fourteen-year-old girl who lives in the rural south of America at the beginning of the twentieth century, Celie is depicted as perfectly fitted for a subservient domestic role. When Celie's stepfather wants to marry her to Albert at the beginning of the novel, he describes her as a '[g]ood housekeeper, good with children, good cook' (21). These were the perfect characteristics for a lower class wife at the beginning of the twentieth century. Although these were the ideal standards for judging any woman at that time, Walker focuses here on the life of black American women who were even more limited in options and oppressed than white women. Unlike white middle class women, they often had to combine care for their own family with agricultural labour as sharecroppers or with work in white homes as domestic servants. According to bell hooks, '[t]he black male slave was primarily exploited as a laborer in the fields; the black female was exploited as a laborer in the fields, a worker in the domestic household, a breeder, and as an object of white male sexual assault' (22). Throughout the first part of the novel, Celie is presented as submissive and obedient to her husband; she works mainly in the home but her downtrodden position echoes the earlier labour and living conditions of slavery. She knows little about the external world until she meets Shug Avery—a blues singer and her husband's girlfriend. Shug is presented as the kind

of unconventional woman who has chosen the public sphere—as a performer and entertainer—at a time when the public and the private spheres were two irreconcilable poles involving mutually exclusive choices for most. In her essay ‘Passing of Matrimony’ (1906), Charlotte Perkins Gilman raises this issue of women being unable to reconcile their existence (and success) in both the public sphere and the private sphere:

We have so arranged life that a man may have a home and family, love, companionship, domesticity, and fatherhood, yet remain an active citizen of his age and country. We have so arranged life, on the other hand, that a woman must “choose”; must either live alone, unloved, unaccompanied, uncared for, homeless, childless, with her work in the world for sole consolation; or give up all world-service for the joys of love, motherhood, and domestic service. (496)

Gilman’s words ring true for later women although they are largely intended as a reflection specifically on the situation of upper- and middle-class white American women at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Shug Avery is presented as the kind of woman who prefers self-realisation and financial independence to marital life and motherhood in the home, especially given that she does not feel this to be her “home” due to the harsh and even violent treatment by husbands of wives at that time. She tells Celie that she left her children with her mother: ‘My kids with their grandma, she say. She could stand the kids, I had to go’ (48). Walker makes it clear that Shug did not choose motherhood willingly. Motherhood has been forced upon her because of lack of access to contraception. However, Shug has broken the mould in continuing with her career and making other ‘unfeminine’ choices. She does not like to cook or to do any housekeeping—although she is a good cook, as Celie informs us towards the end of the novel when they both move into their own “matriarchal” house: ‘Nobody cook like Shug when she cook’ (186). This reflects Beauvoir’s above-mentioned idea that women do not so much reject housework in itself, but that they reject it when it is forced upon them and not shared by men. Shug is depicted as a complex figure who is a successful singer, treated well in the public sphere, even by misogynists like Albert, but she has no personal life as a partner, a wife, or a mother. Even Albert who has loved her throughout his life is unable to marry her because, according to the standards of patriarchy, she is not the kind of woman who can be a good wife. She lives her life moving from one boyfriend to another, and this goes on even into Walker’s 1989-novel *The Temple of My Familiar* that continues her story. By depicting the character of Shug Avery who considers motherhood stifling to her creativity, and the character of Celie who eventually proves that

motherhood is empowering, Walker significantly anticipates Patricia Hill Collins' argument about mothering in black communities. In Collins' view,

[s]ome women view motherhood as a truly burdensome condition that stifles their creativity, exploits their labor, and makes them partners in their own oppression. Others see motherhood as providing a base for self-actualization, status in the Black community, and a catalyst for social activism. These alleged contradictions can exist side by side in African-American communities and families and even within individual women. (176-177)

Walker depicts Sofia Butler as a different kind of woman in the novel and as representing a different stage in the negotiation of the public/private dualism. Although she is, like Celie, caught in domesticity and as an early twentieth-century black American woman has no access to the public sphere of full citizens, she exemplifies a more liberating kind of domesticity. Sofia is shown to have a strong personality, even stronger than that of her husband Harpo. When Harpo first introduces her to him, his father rejects her as a wife for his son because he senses her power, assertiveness, stubbornness and independence. When Albert humiliates and rejects her, '[s]he stand up, big, strong, healthy girl, and she say, Well, nice visiting. I am going home' (32). When Harpo and Sofia get married, 'Harpo wants to know what to do to make Sofia mind. [...] He say, I tell her one thing, she do another. Never do what I say. Always backtalk' (35). Harpo assumes he should have control over Sofia following patriarchal expectations of the time, so he listens to his father's advice, and surprisingly enough Celie's advice, about beating her: 'Wives is like children. You have to let 'em know who got the upper hand. Nothing can do that better than a good sound beating' (35). Yet when Harpo beats Sofia, she beats him back causing serious injuries. Sofia explains to Celie how she became such a strong woman and a fighter:

All my life I had to fight. I had to fight my daddy. I had to fight my brothers. I had to fight my cousins and my uncles. A girl child ain't safe in a family of men. But I never thought I'd have to fight in my own house. [...] I loves Harpo, she say. God knows I do. But I'll kill him dead before I let him beat me. (39)

Although Sofia has managed to assert herself as a powerful woman within the household, she is unable to do the same in wider society where the interlocking hierarchies of oppression expand to include class and racial oppression. Following this, she is imprisoned and then forced to work as a servant for showing strength and dignity before the mayor's wife in a public confrontation. Here the white mayor's wife is shown as having internalised the laws of patriarchal and racial oppression and she reacts harshly because of her insecurity

about the possibility of racial orders being fundamentally disturbed. It is true that Walker presents Sofia as a kind of housewife, but she is presented within the mould of a new kind of liberated, independent, and powerful housewife. She manages to convince Harpo to be supportive as a husband so their relationship might be one of equals, not one of master and slave.²⁴ Her husband even takes on some of the housekeeping. Sofia tells Celie: ‘To tell the truth, he love that part of housekeeping a heap more ‘en me. I rather be out in the fields or fooling with animals. Even chopping wood. But he love cooking and cleaning and doing little things around the house’ (57). Harpo’s cooperation with Sofia in housekeeping can be regarded as Walker’s revaluation of masculinity within the household. It is part of her scheme to approach ‘rebalancing’ between the public and the private spheres because when men work in the house, this will allow women time to work in the public sphere without strict gendering of roles. For example, this happens with Sofia when she works chopping wood. If it is accepted that ‘chopping wood’ and going out in the fields were the kind of public jobs available to black men at that time, then it might be argued that Sofia manages to find a place in the malestream public sphere, but not in the whitestream one.

To return to Celie, there are many factors that have enabled her first to redefine her conception of the public and the private spheres and, second, to reconcile her existence in them. The first is her relationship with Shug Avery. Shug empowers Celie when she teaches her how to resist the sexism of her husband Albert and his sons, who use all means to abuse her. By doing so, the domestic sphere is no longer a suffocating and restrictive sphere for Celie; rather it is a liberating domain and a place of resistance. In her ‘Homeplace: a Site of Resistance’, bell hooks stresses ‘the importance of homeplace in the midst of oppression and domination, of homeplace as a site of resistance and liberation struggle’ (43). It is the moment when Celie gains a voice inside the house and resists the oppression of Albert so that she is able to redefine the domestic sphere as a place of resistance. Towards the end of the novel, in response to Albert’s words to her that she is black, ugly, and poor, Celie says: ‘I’m pore, I’m black, I may be ugly and can’t cook, a voice say to everything listening. But I’m here’ (184). This articulation and self-assertion is the very definition of agency, of joining the public sphere.

Significantly, Celie not only gains a voice in the domestic sphere, but she also thereby gains a voice and becomes an active agent in the public sphere as well. Celie begins to gain agency in the sense of being able to begin to articulate her desires and to begin to implement

²⁴Yet Sofia and Harpo’s marriage does not last for long because Harpo cannot manage to live differently in the face of a society that expects men to rule women and Sofia refuses to comply to a man’s rule.

them through action in the world and to effect change in that world from the moment that she starts to write letters to her sister Nettie, expressing all her thoughts, opinions, and feelings. Perhaps Walker's choice of the epistolary form of narration is intentional as it dramatises Celie's process of gaining a voice. When Celie has a voice and can be heard, we can say that she can begin to find a space of her own in the public sphere. Virginia Woolf joined the public sphere when she started to write reviews, criticism, and fiction and once she defines herself from within the room of her own. Although Woolf might have been working from home, it is undeniable that through her writing she accessed the public sphere successfully. This view gives a new meaning to the public sphere. Different from Aristotle's conception of the public sphere as a sphere concerned with politics only—as explained above, Walker reconceptualises the public sphere as a sphere of agency and of having a voice. By becoming a writer Celie undoubtedly gains a voice. In her Introduction to *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed confirms that becoming a writer means taking a space in the public sphere. She states: 'How important it is, especially for women, to claim that space, to take up the space through what one does with one's body. And so when I am at my table, I am claiming that space, I am becoming a writer by taking up that space' (11).

It is significant that when Celie starts to read Nettie's letters, which Albert has hidden for a long time, new dimensions are added to her character. Now Celie knows about Africa and her knowledge about the world is hugely expanded. Indeed, to gain a voice in the wider conversation is to join the public sphere. Her knowledge about herself is also expanded as she learns that Alphonso, whom she thought to be her father, is actually her stepfather. She also comes to know more about her children Olivia and Adam who live with Nettie in Africa. Regaining the sense of being a mother empowers Celie as Jennifer Harries rightly maintains, '[c]rucial to establishing this domestic order is the process of uniting mothers with children' (204). She writes to Nettie, 'I am so happy. I got love, I got work, I got money, friends and time. And you alive and be home soon. With our children' (191). By the end of the novel, Celie succeeds in becoming a professional seamstress and she owns a small factory, formerly a domestic dining room. This repurposing of space blends the domestic and the commercial as Walker implies that there is no inherent contradiction between the domestic and the public spheres. Shug's support is vital in this development: 'You making your living, Celie, she say. Girl, you on your way' (190). Indeed, a living is one of Celie's pathways to independence and self-realisation. Virginia Woolf's words about women's financial independence as the first step for women's liberation are somewhat relevant here, but as a black American woman, Celie's priority in life in order to be independent is not to gain money, but to have privacy in

the sense of owning one's body. As Jennifer Harris explains: "“Privacy”, of course, also includes the private territory of the body, which cannot be interpreted as a commodity if it is removed from the public sphere to the domestic realm’ (203-204). Walker expresses this working through of the different demands and priorities in life between black women and white women in her *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*. She gives the example of Phillis Wheatley, a slave poet in the 1700s, saying:

Virginia Woolf, in her book *A Room of One's Own*, wrote that in order for a woman to write fiction she must have two things, certainly: a room of her own (with key and lock) and enough money to support herself. What then are we to make of Phillis Wheatley, a slave, who owned not even herself?’ (235)

This is the same idea addressed by Sojourner Truth in the narrative of her life when she says: ‘Oh, I do not want money or clothes now, I only want my son’ (37). Truth said these words in court to get her son Peter back after he was fraudulently sold. Indeed, how can a black woman who does not own her body and whose children are taken from her think primarily of economic independence as in Woolf's Eurocentric perspective?

Another factor that empowers Celie and helps her to reshape her relationship with the domestic domain is the idea of property ownership. After her stepfather dies, Celie gets back the house of her parents. She and Nettie, it turns out, are its real owners. She excitedly writes to Nettie: ‘Oh, Nettie, us have a house! A house big enough for us and our children, for your husband and Shug. Now you can come home cause you have a home to come to!’ (217). Owning the house for Celie is not a matter of money only, it is a matter of feeling secure and safe without being a slave, a servant, or a subservient housewife as black women have been shown to be. It is significant that here Walker uses “home” in the same sense that Toni Morrison implies in her essay ‘Home’. For Morrison, home is the place ‘where racism didn't hurt so much’ (4). It is the place bell hooks defines as a site grounding resistance, growth and restoration. This is the paradise on earth which Celie imagines home to be when she invites her sister to come home at the end of the novel.

Moreover, Celie reconceptualises the public/private dualism when she enters into the Creation as she tells Albert towards the end of the novel: ‘It's time to leave you and *enter into the Creation*’ (179, my italics). Celie leaves Albert and goes with Shug to North Memphis where they live in a house that looks

sort of like a barn. Cept where you would put hay, she got bedrooms and toilets and a big ballroom where she and her band sometime work. She got plenty grounds round the house and a bunch of monuments and a fountain out front. [...] She got a whole

bunch of *elephants and turtles* everywhere. Some big, some little, some in fountain, some up under the trees. *Turtles and elephants*. And all over her house. Curtains got *elephants*, bedspreads got *turtles*. (185, my italics)²⁵

Celie's description of entering 'into the Creation' and of Shug and Celie's house in Memphis further demonstrates Walker's ecofeminist stance. Here Walker blurs the boundaries between the house and the outside world to the degree that one cannot say whether the house is a private or a public domain. To be in the Creation implies more than simply existing in the world; it implies a spiritual and holistic connection, and a sense of entanglement with nature—which is the core of ecofeminism. This state of being in the world enables Celie to come to terms with herself and to reconcile the domestic and the public spheres of her life.

Deconstructing the Public/Private Dualism in *Meridian*:

In *Meridian* (1976), Walker once more, and even more explicitly, explores black women's engagement with the public/private dualism. The story of the novel runs from the early 1940s to 1968, a period of history that witnessed the most extensive protests of African Americans to gain their rights without any segregation. Walker tells *Meridian*'s story against the backdrop of the peak and the end of the Civil Rights Movement, a moment when racial struggles and African American politics reached unprecedented visibility and purchase in the US public sphere. As in *The Color Purple*, here too Walker depicts two examples of black women's conceptualisation of the public and the private spheres through the characters of *Meridian* and her mother Mrs Hill. In some ways Mrs Hill belongs to the generation of first-wave feminists of the 1920s and 1930s who experienced the joy of being able to work and engage with the public sphere. Unlike most African American women at the time, she is able to follow a professional career. Before getting married, '[t]here had been a delight in her independence, an adventure in the fingering of her possibilities, but she wanted more life to

²⁵I kept asking myself why Walker chose elephants and turtles to be Shug's decorative pets. Research confirms that Walker chose them intentionally as symbols. Elephants usually live in matriarchal herds because each family of elephants is dominated by a female elephant called the matriarch. No adult male elephants are allowed in the herd and they only keep young male elephants in the herd until they are mature. Adult male elephants come to the herd only at the time of mating. See more information at <https://www.theelephantpants.com/blogs/the-elephant-post/why-elephants-are-the-original-feminists-1>

This is very much like the life that Shug and Celie choose to live in their mature years. As for the turtles, I was interested to find that the turtle is taken as the symbol for Sacred Turtle Woman, a feminist movement that calls for ending violence against all women. The activists in this movement argue that the spirit of the turtle is feminine and that it represents patience, fertility, and nurturing. See more information at <https://sdcedsv.org/aboutus/sacredturtlewoman/>
Approaches that emphasise an empowering relationship between women and animals will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

happen to her. More richness, more texture' (40-41). She felt 'the joy of earning money as a schoolteacher. She had known the freedom of thinking out the possibilities of her life. They were actually two: She might stay in her home town and teach or she might move elsewhere and teach' (40). As time goes on, she faces the same dilemma discussed by Gilman as mentioned above. Mrs Hill has to choose between continuing her work as a schoolteacher and achieving her dream of being a mother, because women were not offered the possibility of choosing both. She 'noticed that other girls were falling in love, getting married. It seemed to produce a state of euphoria in them. She became unsure that her own way of living was as pleasant as she thought it was. It seemed to have an aimlessness to it that did not lead anywhere' (41). She was quite sure that 'as a teacher she earned both money and respect. This mattered to her. But there grew in her a feeling that the mothers of her pupils, no matter that they envied her clothes, her speech, her small black car, pitied her' (41).

Mrs Hill's desire to be a mother, fostered by the attitudes of those around her, won the battle and she left her job to get married. Her choice to be a mother in the private domain also cannot be separated from the fact that as a free black American woman who witnessed the consequences of slavery, she aspires to a protected intimacy and privacy in the home that black women like herself historically were denied. Unlike for white American women at that time, the issue of working in the public sphere was less one of achieving economic equality with their male counterparts and more one of securing an overall income to sustain their families. In this sense, Mrs Hill and her generation experience their lives as more fundamentally affected by racial than by gender oppression. They do not appear to scrutinise gender roles in the same way Meridian will do later. This is why Mrs Hill's choice to leave her work and stay at home can also be read as a form of resistance to the traditional white structure which deprived many black American mothers of taking care of their own families. By doing so Mrs Hill is seen to be aspiring to a model of womanhood from which she is excluded as a black woman. Patricia Hill Collins quotes the words of African-American studies scholar Elsa Barkley Brown about her black American mother who, although college-educated, preferred to stay at home and withdraw from the labour force. In an unpublished manuscript, Brown rightly argues that her mother's 'decision to be a wife and mother first in a world which defined black women in so many other ways, the decision to make her family the most important priority, was an act of resistance' (Quoted in Collins 54-55).

Mrs Hill has subsequently given birth to six children and has become totally immersed in the domestic sphere. Although having children was her choice, she is still unhappy because she has always felt that she lacks something: the opportunity to engage with

the public sphere and to assert her own individual being, identity and voice. In order to examine this sense of lack, Walker writes of Mrs Hill that, after having children, she ‘walked away from her own life, brick by brick’ because her ‘frail independence gave way to the pressures of motherhood and she learned—much to her horror and amazement—that she was not even allowed to be resentful that she was “caught.” That her personal life was over’ (42).²⁶ It is true that Mrs Hill chose motherhood deliberately, but lack of access to contraception limited her options, perhaps contributing to the large size of her family, and her society does not allow women to continue with careers after marriage and motherhood. Fuelled by resentment at leaving ‘her own life’ behind, she refuses to throw herself into meeting the standards of good housekeeping at that time or into domestic forms of creativity:

She never learned to cook well, she never learned to braid hair prettily or to be in any other way creative in her home. She could have done so, if she had wanted to. Creativity was in her, but it was refused expression. It was all deliberate. A war against those to whom she could not express her anger or shout, “it’s not fair!” (42)

After seeing her mother ensnared in this domestic life and neglecting personal achievement in her life, Meridian is cautious about marriage, domesticity and motherhood. Unlike Celie, who starts her life as a domestic housewife until she achieves equilibrium and becomes a successful businesswoman too, Meridian Hill starts her life as a woman who despises domesticity and who becomes immersed in the activist politics being played out in the public sphere. It is important to note that the public sphere for Meridian is different from the public sphere for Celie. Celie’s public sphere marks her gaining a voice and agency on a personal level; but for Meridian, who witnesses great political changes regarding the lives of black American people, the public sphere is that sphere of activism that reaches back to Aristotle’s conception of it as an actively political sphere.

Yet, in high school, Meridian fell in love with her friend Edward and they marry after discovering she is pregnant with her son Eddie Jr. Walker depicts Meridian’s unconventional or, rather, noncompliant reaction as a mother-to-be: She ‘never thought about the baby at all’ as she ‘knew she did not want it’ (59). She also shows a lack of interest and skill in the domestic duties she is now expected to perform; her husband complains ‘about small things that bothered him: the ironing of his clothes, and even her own, which she did not do nearly

²⁶Rebecca Walker, Alice Walker’s daughter and a representative of third-wave feminism, investigates the myth surrounding motherhood that was prevalent in second-wave feminism in her memoir *Baby Love: Choosing Motherhood After a Lifetime of Ambivalence*. She discusses how women of her generation and some earlier generations were brought up with a sense of feminist suspicion towards motherhood. She wrote this book in 2007 when she was pregnant with her son and she advises late motherhood: ‘When you grow up you can embrace motherhood wholeheartedly and still accomplish great things’.

as well as his mother. [...] The cooking, which she was too queasy to do at all; and the sex, which she did not seem (he said) interested in' (60). After becoming certain that this domestic life is not for her, Meridian renounces her baby, leaving him with her mother, and separates from her husband. In an echo of Shug Avery, she never again occupies a conventional household or home. Although her mother has never been satisfied with her own domestic life, mirroring society's demands, she wants Meridian to sacrifice herself to domesticity and repeat her own limited and unhappy life. She remonstrates to Meridian: "“You should *want* Eddie Jr., Unless you're some kind of monster. And no daughter of mine is a monster, surely”" (88, original italics). If we compare Mrs Hill's attitude towards Meridian's rejection of domesticity to Celie's opposition to Sofia's assertiveness when she advises Harpo to beat Sofia, we will hardly find Mrs Hill's attitude so strange. It is a feeling of jealousy between generations of women, and also an internalisation of compliance to society as it is, rather than an attempt to break out and forge an alternative pathway. The older generation (represented by Celie and Mrs Hill) are envious of the younger generation (Sofia and Meridian) who can, to some extent, do what they could not because of the delimited situations, choices and roles that patriarchy constructed for women.

Because her IQ is exceptionally high, Meridian is offered a scholarship by a white family 'who wished to help some of the poor, courageous blacks' and so she attends Saxon College in Atlanta. Yet, one day in April 1960, a house of black people in Meridian's neighbourhood is bombed. It is on that day that, as the narrator states, 'Meridian Hill became aware of the past and present of the larger world' (70). From that day on, Meridian knows that the life of activism is the kind of life she wants. To access the public sphere for Meridian is to engage in politics and to be concerned with black people's problems. This is why Roberta Hendrickson reads the novel as one

that affirms the Movement's vision of freedom and nonviolence, affirms blackness and African American heritage in a racist society that failed to value and continued to destroy black lives, and focuses on black women and their participation in the Movement, refusing to make them less than they had been. *Meridian* is what Walker would later call a "womanist" novel: it combines the black consciousness and feminist consciousness that grew out of the Civil Rights Movement. (113)

In Atlanta, Meridian lives a drifting life, wandering from neighbourhood to neighbourhood with the revolutionaries. Eventually the room where she lives is more like 'a cell' (9) as she 'owned no furniture, beyond the sleeping bag, which, on inspection, did not appear to be very clean' (9). She hates being indoors and, in working on the streets for the

political cause, ‘thought of herself as an adventurer. It thrilled her to think that she belonged to the people who produced Harriet Tubman, the only American woman who’d led troops in battle’ (112). After many years of this activist work, she has come to live, in effect, a ‘life of withdrawal from the world, a life of constant awareness of death’ (16). Although she assumes that in neglecting her femininity, her body, her health, and the domestic/family side of herself, she is therefore oriented towards the public and away from the private, moving out into the world, what has happened is the reverse: her body, neglected, has now become very weak and she finds herself alone on the brink of death. Here Meridian is surely being represented by Walker as an example of those second-wave feminists who took the slogan “the personal is the political” to extremes in denying themselves altogether affecting domestic lives or care of the self. She has come to believe that only in being exclusively focused on the political and public can she assert herself. In *The Good-Natured Feminist*, ecofeminist Catriona Sandilands maintains that ‘the personal must always be seen to be potentially political, but that is not to suggest that it is always already political. While we must certainly interrogate the arrangements by which public and private life are constituted, that does not mean that they should be the same thing’ (159). Nancy Fraser also contends in her *Unruly Practices* that ‘[w]hen everything is political, the sense and specificity of the political recedes, giving rise to still another inflection of the expression *le retrait du politique*: the retreat or withdrawal of the political’ (76).

This ‘retreat of the political’ is what happens with Meridian because when she ignores ‘nature’ with all its connotations of immanence, domesticity, maternity, sexuality, and the body, she is also unable to work effectively in public service and so loses both the private and the public domains of her life. Meridian not only suffers from a split between her personal and political life, she also finds it irreconcilable to be an artist—as she is a poet—and a revolutionary. According to Hendrickson, ‘Meridian, who is a poet and loves and collects the songs of the black church, is meant by Walker to be seen as a black revolutionary artist’ (116). Throughout the novel, Meridian keeps asking herself and the other revolutionaries how to be a true revolutionary without spilling blood and how to get black people’s rights while living in peace. Towards the end of the novel Meridian faces herself with this dilemma of being torn between art, informed by the ‘old music,’ and revolutionary work:

It was this [...] I have not wanted to face, this that has caused me to suffer: I am not to belong to the future. I am to be left, listening to the old music, beside the highway. But then, [...] perhaps it will be my part to walk behind the real revolutionaries—those who know they must spill blood in order to help the poor and the black and

therefore go right ahead.[...] If I can only do that, my role will not have been a useless one after all. (221)

Just as suggested earlier in this chapter—that deconstructing the public/private dualism is a direct consequence of deconstructing the transcendence/immanence dualism—so it is, when Meridian makes a compromise between transcendence and immanence, that she reconciles the public and the private spheres. When she experiences a journey of spiritual transformation, Meridian is ‘released’—and Walker chooses the title of the final chapter of the novel to be ‘Release’. She is released from all the myths surrounding the body, motherhood, immanence, and domesticity; she returns ‘to the world cleansed of sickness’ (241). She is healed and recreated as she expresses in her poem:

*there is water in the world for us
brought by our friends
though the rock of mother and god
vanishes into sand
and we, cast out alone
to heal
and re-create
ourselves.* (236, original italics)

To recapitulate, Walker explores in *Meridian* and *The Color Purple* two different conceptualisations of the public sphere. The public sphere in *Meridian* is political in the Aristotelian sense, whereas in *The Color Purple* to access the public sphere is more subtly to gain a voice and agency. Walker wrote *Meridian* early in her career when she was feeling her way politically and aesthetically, beginning to conceive her theory of womanist spirituality. She was still thinking of how to be spiritual without forfeiting or foregoing agency. It was later in *The Color Purple* that she found the answer to this question. As her fiction theorises, the answer is to deconstruct the sets of dualisms that function to exclude and oppress and to reclaim good relationships with all people and with the natural world.

Wilderness Re-visited: Deconstructing the Public/Private Dualism in the Writings of Marilynne Robinson:

Although both Walker and Robinson deconstruct the public/private dualism in their narratives, they do so in specifically different ways. Walker is more concerned with redefining the public sphere—a sphere that black American women had long been prevented from accessing. On the other hand, Robinson is more concerned with reconceptualising the

private sphere and extending it. As suggested earlier in this chapter and will further be explored below, Marilynne Robinson's attempt to deconstruct the public/private dualism and to reconceive the wilderness is an integral part of both her religious orientation and feminist interests.

Blurring the Public/Private Boundary in *Housekeeping*:

In his 'The Metaphysics of Ecology in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*', George Handley rightly argues that the novel 'consistently inaugurates an imagination of profound confluence between nature and culture and explores what it would mean for culture to establish a more profound equilibrium with ecological process' (507). Indeed, Marilynne Robinson's deconstruction of the public/private dualism is chiefly built on the symbolism of her blurring of the boundary between the house and the outside world. Her first novel *Housekeeping* (1980) sets the ground for her views on the meanings of home and wilderness, which are expressed in all her four novels. Robinson uses the title 'Housekeeping' deceptively because, throughout the novel, she reacts against the traditional meaning of housekeeping, which for a long time has been used by patriarchy to keep women enclosed in the domestic sphere. The novel tells the story of Ruth and Lucille, two orphaned teenage sisters who lost their mother early in their lives when she committed suicide. They have been brought up by their grandmother, then by their grandmother's sisters Lily and Nona until taken into the care of their aunt Sylvie.

As in Walker's novels, in *Housekeeping*, Robinson portrays two different kinds of women's conceptualisation of domesticity. The first account of domesticity is encountered early in the novel with Ruth and Lucille's grandmother. Ruth, the narrator of the novel, talks about her grandmother in the terms of stereotypical domesticity. After her husband's death in a train accident, the grandmother has brought up her three daughters in the conviction that the house is the safest place in the world: "Sell the orchards," she would say, looking grave and wise, "but keep the house. So long as you look after your health, and own the roof above your head, you're as safe as anyone can be" (27). The grandmother has lived her life immersed in domesticity and excluded from any engagement with the public domain. As Ruth narrates, her grandmother has lived believing that her domesticity could intersect with the public sphere only after her death: 'Since my grandmother had a little income and owned her house outright, she always took satisfaction in thinking ahead to the time when her simple private destiny would intersect with the great public processes of law and finance—that is, to the

time of her death' (27). Robinson alludes to the notion that there might be alternative modes of the domestic ahead when Ruth suggests that her grandmother expected that after her death

[a]ll the habits and patterns and properties that had settled around her, the monthly checks from the bank, the house she had lived in since she came to it as a bride, the weedy orchard that surrounded the yard on three sides where smaller and wormier apples and apricots and plums had fallen every year of her widowhood, *all these things would suddenly become liquid, capable of assuming new forms.* (27, my italics)

This image of the 'liquidity' of the house is highly significant in the novel. It denotes flexibility and mobility rather than rigidity and fixity. Actually these 'new forms' of home life, or different perspectives on dwelling in the house, emerge in the novel even before the grandmother's death, at the moment when her daughter Helen, Ruth and Lucille's mother, ends her own life because she hates her domestic existence and can do nothing to extricate herself from it except to end her life. Ruth describes her mother's life as 'strictly simple and circumscribed' (109). It is significant in the novel that Ruth's and Lucille's characters are very different. Lucille remembers her mother to be 'orderly, vigorous, and sensible, a widow[...] who was killed in an accident' (109), whereas Ruth's memory of her mother is that she hated housekeeping and could not continue it nor take care of her daughters. She says: 'She tended us with a *gentle indifference* that made me feel she would have liked to have been even more alone—she was the *abandoner*, and not the one abandoned' (109, my italics).

The characters of the grandmother and Helen signify the different feminist stages of conceptualising the public/private dualism. The grandmother's immersion in domesticity corresponds with the early generations of women who were entrapped in the house, usually unable to escape a patriarchally defined domestic role. Though Helen's character corresponds with the stance of an earlier generation of feminists who were all too aware of this trap of domesticity, because she still feels torn between on the one hand her desire to access the public domain to achieve her own self and, on the other hand, her maternal love towards her daughters, she commits suicide. In his 'History, Critical Theory, and Women's Social Practices: "Women's Time" and *Housekeeping*', Thomas Foster comments on this, arguing that '[i]n contrast to the grandmother, the girls' mother, Helen, internalized a masculine concept of individuality as detachment rather than the engagement prominent in the grandmother's behavior' (87). A third type of woman that we encounter in the novel is Sylvie the aunt (Helen's sister). It is not a coincidence that "Sylvie" is a name of French origin which means 'from the forest': Sylvie is repeatedly connected to the outdoors. Indeed, even

before Sylvie's arrival we know from Lily and Nona that she is 'an itinerant', 'a migrant worker', and 'a drifter' (31). As her name denotes, Sylvie is depicted as a woman who hates boundaries. Judged by conventional standards of good housekeeping, Sylvie is not the kind of woman who can take the responsibility of bringing up Ruth and Lucille. Significantly, she keeps moving to and from the house throughout the novel. Ruth comments that:

Sylvie kept her clothes and even her hairbrush and toothpowder in a cardboard box under the bed. She slept on top of the covers, with a quilt over her, which during the daytime she pushed under the bed also. Such habits (she always kept clothed, at first with her shoes on, and then, after a month or two, with her shoes under her pillow) were clearly *the habits of a transient* (102-103, my italics)

Sylvie offers a different model to the grandmother who foresees movement (or liquidity) only in death, and to Helen who leaves home but cannot endure her subsequent domestic, material existence; Sylvie is defined instead by associations with mobility, a refusal of settling down, and nonconformity with social expectations.

Challenging the American Frontiersman Archetype:

By creating the character of Sylvie as a female outsider and a heroine who can be no less courageous, daring, and free than the mobile American male hero as celebrated in the male-dominated literary tradition of James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851), and Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), Robinson reconstructs the wilderness as a historically and socially gendered space. She presents it as a site of resistance and a domain for introducing alternative femininity, free of gender-role stereotypes. A clear example of these stereotypes concerning the wilderness is found in Roderick Frazier Nash's argument in *Wilderness and the American Mind* (1967) when he claims that the wilderness is 'a source of virility, toughness, and savagery' (145). He explores what he calls the 'wilderness cult' in the works of nineteenth-century transcendentalists such as John Muir, Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, and Herman Melville. All these American writers, in Nash's view, 'came to understand that the wilderness [or the frontier] was essential to pioneering' and 'pioneering [...] came to be regarded as important not only for spearheading the advance of civilization but for bringing Americans into contact with the primitive' (145). This links narratives of masculine adventure with the colonising movements outwards of both European and American imperialism, while women in this tradition are alternatively associated with retreat

and a domesticating—sometimes stiflingly so—influence that pulls back into domestic safety. Stacy Alaimo, in *Undomesticated Ground*, endorses Robinson's reimagined view of the wilderness as a site of resistance to traditional gender roles, maintaining that women enter the wilderness 'precisely in order to throw off—or complement, subvert, or bracket—their domestic roles' (15). Marilyn R. Chandler in her *Dwelling in the Text: Houses in American Fiction* also likens Sylvie to both Thoreau and Melville's character Ishmael in her wandering nature, in a way that subverts the American wilderness as exclusively a masculine sphere:

Sylvie identifies in her deepest being with the rhythms of nature and the large cycles of seasonal change and geological movement. [...] She is a woman who has made the world her home, for whom, as for Thoreau and Ishmael, the sky is her roof and the wide earth itself is a home she knows to be safe and habitable. (300)

In the same vein, Elizabeth A. Meese rightly points out that 'Robinson demonstrates that transiency is an exercise of female autonomy, a necessary outcome of woman's refusal to participate in the socially imposed economy of gender roles' (62). Meese's argument is also persuasive:

Through the women in *Housekeeping*, Robinson composes both feminist theory and fiction; by making the strange familiar, the reverse effect occurs as well. She maps a shadowy territory between difference and sameness, preparing us for an existence predicated on hope and defined only by uncertainty. (68)

Along the same lines, ecofeminist Karen Warren not only explores women's access to the wilderness as a reaction to the constraints of femininity, but—as an ecofeminist activist—she engages in a special programme that allows women to experience adventures in the wilderness in order to acquire a sense of empowerment. Warren sets out to discuss the different myths underlying the conceptions of women's adventure experience. She contests the suitability of 'the myth of the heroic quest' for women, where the hero 'hears a call to adventure, leaves home, encounters dragons on the way and slays them, reflects on his conquest, and returns home as a hero with a clearer understanding of himself' (16). According to Warren, 'the woman's journey in the wilderness is a direct contradiction of the popular quest model' (16) because, unlike traditional male adventurers who want to conquer nature, women are more concerned with 'a new heroic quest based on bonding with the natural world rather than conquering it' (Warren 16).

Discussing this historically gendered view of the American frontier and wilderness in her 'My Western Roots', Robinson overtly argues that she has depicted the character of Sylvie in *Housekeeping* in order to deconstruct such definitions of the wilderness:

My one great objection to the American hero was that he was inevitably male—in decayed forms egregiously male. So I created a female hero, of sorts, also an outsider and a stranger. And while Sylvie obviously has her own history, to the degree that she has not taken the impress of society she expresses the fact that human nature is replete with nameless possibilities, and, by implication, that the world is accessible to new ways of understanding. (No Pagination)

Indeed, Sylvie is a transient and a wanderer who breaks away from the patriarchal tradition of housekeeping and women's domesticity. Robinson's detailing of her storage of her possessions and mode of sleeping draws attention to her rejection of 'settling down' or making herself at home in the usual way. In an ironic gesture to the meaning of housekeeping, Sylvie comes to understand 'keeping' literally to mean keeping and storing all things in the house. Ruth comments that she keeps empty cans and newspapers 'because she considered accumulation to be the essence of housekeeping' (180).

Although Sylvie sometimes stays in the house, she is always ready to move away from it to go into the woods where she feels more comfortable. Ruth describes Sylvie as 'more or less like a mermaid in a ship's cabin. She preferred it sunk in the very element it was meant to exclude. We had crickets in the pantry, squirrels in the eaves, sparrows in the attic' (99). This image of the ship is very significant in the novel and it is related to the idea of the liquidity of the house referred to above. Robinson refutes the thinking that relates a particular locale or a place to a sense of home. She celebrates fluidity and transience rather than stability and domesticity. By arguing for a fluidity of space, Robinson implicitly argues for a more fluid view of gender roles. Stacy Alaimo consolidates this idea, arguing that '[w]hen sexual division becomes indistinguishable from spatial division, the transgression of spatial boundaries becomes a means for contesting the very nature of sexual difference' (58). Likening Sylvie's house to a ship is Robinson's way of transgressing and traversing the boundaries between interior and exterior, between mobility and stasis, between fluidity and stability. In her 'Delinquent Housekeeping: Transforming the Regulations of Keeping House', Christine Wilson contends that *Housekeeping* 'underscores how the ship functions as a site of (re)imagining the role of domesticity in women's life', linking 'flexible special practices with fluid gender roles and [laying] the groundwork to redefine domesticity' (299). In addition, she also suggests that 'habitability is not tied to a particular kind of space or

location but rather to a relation between the subject and space' (299-300). According to Wilson, '[t]he ark allows Robinson to maintain the idea of a living space that is both a refuge and a home without negating the need for freedom, movement, and flexibility' (305).

Interestingly, Robinson's employment of the metaphor of the ship to describe the house anticipates Foucault's idea of the ship as a placeless space.²⁷ In his 'Different Spaces', Foucault explores how places are historically hierarchized and put in opposition to each other. In his view, 'emplacement' should replace 'localisation' because emplacement denotes flexibility and liquidity while localisation denotes fixity. He argues that 'We are in an age when space is presented to us in the form of relations of emplacement' (177). Moreover, Foucault puts forth the problem of the duality of space, contending that:

[P]erhaps our life is still dominated by a certain number of oppositions that cannot be tampered with, that institutions and practices have not ventured to change—oppositions we take for granted, for example, between private space and public space, between the family space and social space, between cultural space and useful space, between the space of leisure activities and the space of work. (177)

In his attempt to illustrate this kind of liquid emplacement, Foucault proposes the word 'heterotopia' as the kind of place that contains 'all times, all ages, all forms, all tastes in one place, [...] a place of all times that is itself outside time and protected from its erosion' (182). He presents the ship as one kind of heterotopia: 'the ship is a piece of floating space, a placeless space, that lives by its own devices, that is self-enclosed and, at the same time, delivered over to the boundless expanse of the ocean' (184-85). This 'sailing vessel is the heterotopia par excellence' (185). In her discussion of the idea of orientation, feminist Sara Ahmed posits the same view of the flexibility and the ability of homes to move. She argues that 'homes too can be "giddy" places where things are not always held in place, and homes can move, as we do' (9).

One also cannot overlook Ruth's description of the existence of crickets, squirrels, and sparrows in Sylvie's house. First, it is an indication of Sylvie's stance of being in the world, dwelling in and with nature—a position that can be aligned with ecofeminism. Indeed, she expands the notion of the household to include all nature and breaks all boundaries between the house and outside world, between the private and the public, in order to feel

²⁷I stress the fact that Robinson here predates Foucault in proposing the metaphor of the house as a ship because Robinson was probably not engaging with Foucault directly: Foucault talked about this first in a lecture in 1967 that was not published until in 1984, three years after she published *Housekeeping*.

whole and complete. Second, it is an echo of the Biblical story of Noah's ark in which he gathered animals in his ark to start a new life after the flood. Ruth contends that when Sylvie was in the house, 'it seemed that if the house were not to founder, it must soon begin to *float*' (125, my italics). In the story of Noah's ark, God orders Noah to build a great ship and to shelter in it a couple of each kind of animal. Noah's ark was perched on a hill and his neighbours laughed at him until there was a flood that drowned all the town except Noah's ark which floated on water safely. This story corresponds with many incidents in *Housekeeping*. The house in which Sylvie and Ruth live is built of wood and it sits over a hill. It also shelters animals as Ruth narrates that once there was a flood in the city that drowned most of the houses but their house was untouched, and 'various women came to ask after cats and dogs that they thought might have sheltered with us' (75). Later in the narrative, Robinson mentions Noah's story directly when Ruth states: 'Imagine that Noah knocked his house apart and used the planks to build an ark, while his neighbors looked on, full of doubt. A house, he must have told them, should be daubed with pitch and built to float cloud high, if need be' (184). Robinson here refers to the fact that Noah was saved because he did not take notice of people's mocking of him; similarly Sylvie and Ruth live happily because they disregard their neighbour's criticism of their style of life. Although Robinson's allusion to the Bible here is certain, her envisioning of the house as a ship that moves from one place to the other also references the US transcendentalist thinker Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882). In his 'Montaigne; Or, The Skeptic' (1876), Emerson maintains:

The philosophy we want is one of fluxions and mobility. The Spartan and Stoic schemes are too stark and stiff for our occasion. A theory of Saint John, and of non-resistance, seems, on the other hand, too thin and aerial. We want some coat woven of elastic steel, stout as the first, and limber as the second. *We want a ship in these billows we inhabit. An angular, dogmatic house would be rent to chips and splinters, in this storm of many elements. No, it must be tight, and fit to the form of man, to live at all; as a shell is the architecture of a house founded on the sea. The soul of man must be the type of our scheme, just as the body of man is the type after which a dwelling-house is built*'. (160, my italics)

Although Emerson here uses the ship-house figuratively to explain his idea that philosophical ideas must be mobile and flexible rather than dogmatic and rigid, still his influence on Robinson and her investigation of housekeeping is evident especially when he speaks about

the idea of transitionality and moving to and from the house to gain greater experience and understanding in life in his ‘Plato; Or, The Philosopher’:

Every great artist has been such by synthesis. Our strength is transitional, alternating; or, shall I say, a thread of two strands. The sea-shore, sea seen from shore, shore seen from sea; the taste of two metals in contact; and our enlarged powers at the approach and at the departure of a friend; the experience of poetic creativeness, *which is not found in staying at home, nor yet in travelling, but in transitions from one to the other*, which must therefore be adroitly managed to present as much *transitional* surface as possible. (56, my italics)²⁸

Yet, in his reference to the traveller who moves from one place to another to gain experience and synthesis, Emerson means it to be a male traveller, a male wanderer. This tradition and association of transitionality with the male figure is what Robinson seeks to subvert and challenge.

The imagery of fire in the novel is also important in furthering understanding of how Robinson challenges the traditional role of housekeeping. Significantly, once when the curtain catches fire, ‘Sylvie had beaten out the flames with a back issue of *Good Housekeeping*’ (101). As its title suggests, *Good Housekeeping* is a magazine aimed at women readers that specialises in discussing all that is related to the household and housekeeping. It was first issued in the US in 1885—a time when popular magazines and religious talks hegemonously propagated the desirability of women’s domesticity as a proof of their morality. Sylvie’s act of burning this magazine prefigures her burning of the house at the end of the novel and reflects her repudiation and reinvention of ideas of femininity. Whether the burning of the house is real or just figurative, it indicates Sylvie’s deconstruction of the public/private dualism by blurring all boundaries between the domestic household and nature in order to allow women to lead a more fully free and liberating life. This is evident in the novel’s ending when Ruth and Sylvie burn down the house while laughing: ‘we knew it was a solemn thing to burn a house down. To any other eye we might have seemed wild and pranking, unhuman spirits in the house, to whom lampshades and piano scarves were nothing’

²⁸ In her interview with Jason Green, Robinson expresses this same idea when she states, ‘I wrote *Gilead* and *Home* still aware that Iowa was an adopted home for me. I have always felt at a remove from the place where I lived. Although I was born in Sandpoint, Idaho I spent my childhood in other towns and came there to visit my grandparents for summers and holidays. It was home to my family, not really to me, though their feelings about it and the stories I heard made it seem to epitomize home. So I have reasons for my own interest in arriving and leaving, for being at a remove. I know other writers also deal with these things, so I suppose it is in some way a universal human experience that I understand in terms particular to myself’ (Paragraph 17).

(208). Ruth concludes, '[n]ow truly we were cast out to wander, and there was *an end to housekeeping*' (209, my italics). Analysing the ending of the novel from a feminist lens, Foster rightly argues that:

The novel ends with the two women never knowing for certain whether the house was actually destroyed or whether Ruth's sister Lucille might be living there, since Lucille had rejected Sylvie's alternative economy of the home by running away to live with her Home Economics teacher. Through the choices the two sisters make, Ruth accepting Sylvie's way of life and Lucille accepting a conventional gender role, the narrative asks the reader to choose one or the other of these two perspectives and thus to undertake the political act of either endorsing or rejecting Ruth and Sylvie's rebellion. (85-86)

Foster simplifies the novel a bit here because it is not Robinson's intention to force the readers to choose between two options. The novel is more suggestive and fluid in its theorising.

Another patriarchal tradition that Robinson breaks away from is that of relating good motherhood to housekeeping when Ruth remarks that Lily and Nona 'took up housekeeping in Fingerbone, just as my grandmother had wished', but simultaneously failed to be mothers to Ruth and Lucille (29). On the other hand, Sylvie the transient who does not do housekeeping in the traditional manner succeeds, albeit in often non-conformist ways, to be a real mother to the girls. This is evidently illustrative of Robinson's deconstruction of the linking of domesticity with morality and piety. Ruth states that in their society 'every wanderer whose presence suggested it might be as well to drift, or it could not matter much, was met with something that seemed at first sight *a moral reaction*, since morality is a check upon the strongest temptations' (178, my italics). Propelled by such a 'moral reaction', the ladies of the neighbourhood 'were obliged to come by their notions of *piety* and *good breeding*, and by a desire, a determination, to keep [Ruth], so to speak, *safely within doors*' (183, my italics). They insisted that the girls need 'an orderly life' (185) and that they 'should be rescued, and that rescue was possible' from Sylvie's peculiar behaviour (178). Not surprisingly, it is women, usually from the older generations, who want to force Sylvie to live an ordinary domestic life like them although they are not happy with their own lives. It is an echo of the situation of Meridian's mother and Celie. In addition, we encounter in the novel two different positions within the younger generation as represented by Ruth and Lucille. Ruth and Lucille differ in their memory of their mother: Ruth remembers her mother Helen as being a transient and a drifter at heart just like Sylvie, committing suicide because she

cannot make a compromise and fully inhabit the domestic sphere; Lucille remembers her mother as being a good housekeeper who died in a car accident. Ruth is very like her aunt Sylvie in her transient nature. She too enjoys wandering outside of the house and entering into the natural world. According to Ruth, Sylvie's 'itinerancy might not be simple banishment. Her drifting, properly considered, might be no more than a preference for the single life' (42). She explains that when she goes with Sylvie to the woods, she goes 'for the woods' sake, while, increasingly, Lucille seemed to be enduring a banishment there' (99). Such habits of movement and blurring of the boundaries between the house and the outside world 'offended Lucille's *sense of propriety*' because she 'hated everything that had to do with transience' (103, my italics). Lucille likes household routine, unlike Ruth who wants always to be wandering in the natural world. Ruth says to Lucille: 'When you are tired of that [routine] let's go to the lake' (132). It is not surprising that Lucille moves out because she cannot stand Sylvie and Ruth's transient existence. Instead she goes to the house of Miss Royce, the Home Economics teacher—a typical example of traditional domesticity. Yet Ruth was proud to say: 'Sylvie was an unredeemed transient, and she was making a transient of me' (177).

But why does Robinson choose to depict Sylvie as a solitary transgressive figure? This solitariness might easily be misunderstood as a way of living outside of the public sphere. Yet, this is surely not what Robinson intends. It is true that Sylvie is a solitary woman, but she is never away from the public sphere. This is elucidated when Robinson explains what she means by being solitary in her essay 'My Western Roots'. She prefers to use the word 'lonesome', arguing that it 'is a word with strongly positive connotations' ('My Western Roots' No Pagination). Robinson writes in the same essay that she remembers when she was a child walking in the woods 'feeling that my solitude, my loneliness made me almost acceptable in so sacred a place' (No Pagination). Here she deconstructs the boundary between acceptedness or integration into something bigger, and solitariness. In addition, she deconstructs the duality between individualism and social responsibility and argues that there is no contradiction at all between them; she praises what she calls 'the cult of the individual,' arguing:

I am praising that famous individualism associated with western and American myth. [...] The opposition frequently made between individualism on one hand and responsibility to society on the other is a false opposition as we all know. Those who

look at things from a little distance can never be valued sufficiently. ('My Western Roots' No Pagination)

In Robinson's view, '[o]nly lonesomeness allows one to experience this sort of radical singularity' ('My Western Roots' No Pagination). This 'radical singularity' does not mean being isolated from society. Rather, it is a way of contemplating and critiquing the problems of society in an attempt to solve them. She expresses this openly when she praises the writers of the American frontier for choosing solitariness as a way to express their discontent with society, but they did not stop at that point of discontent and they and their peers went further in action to reform society:

The American frontier was what it was because it expressed a considerable optimism about what people were and what they might become. [...] In Whitman the outsider is a visionary. In Thoreau he is a critic. In the vernacular of western myth he is a rescuer and avenger. In every version he expresses discontent with society. So it is not surprising that he is the creation of generations that accomplished more radical reforms of society than had ever been attempted anywhere before. (My Western Roots' No Pagination)

Thus, Robinson's ecofeminist stance manifests itself in *Housekeeping* in the way she deconstructs a series of dualisms pertaining to the public/private dualism such as women's morality/domesticity, feeling at home/domesticity, and individuation/social responsibility. This also takes a particular form in response to traditions of American thought and culture, including engagements with settlements, frontier wilderness and social discontent. She goes on to deconstruct further sets of dualisms such as the duality between feeling safe and the wilderness in *Lila* as will be explored below.

Redefining the Wilderness in *Lila*:

Lila (2014) is the final novel in Robinson's Gilead trilogy. This section will analyse *Lila* as a narrative exemplary of how Robinson advances her ecofeminist position through a reconceptualization of wilderness and a deconstruction of the public/private dualism. *Lila* is chosen for analysis here because, although it is written thirty four years after *Housekeeping*, it brings the reader back into the debates of *Housekeeping* with its rejection of patriarchal gender roles and challenging of the demarcation between the public and the private spheres. I agree with Sarah Blackwood in her 'The Woman Wild' when she argues that *Gilead* and

Home ‘have always seemed set somehow apart from the luminous feminine world that Robinson created in *Housekeeping*. *Lila*, however, closes the loop’ (No Pagination). Blackwood rightly maintains:

By bringing this female waywardness into the Gilead world, Robinson prompts us to return to the dualities that underpin *Housekeeping* — transience and home, domesticity and wildness, the ordinary and the strange, taking care and doing damage. *Gilead* and *Home* feature men who inhabit domesticity as a sort of faith and for whom faith serves an important sheltering function. The itinerant central women of *Housekeeping* and *Lila* press hard on the tender buttons of their benevolent theology: what becomes of those who live their lives outside of these structures? (No Pagination)

When the reader first encounters Lila in *Gilead*, she is introduced as the second wife of Reverend John Ames, very much younger than him and the mother of his seven-year-old son Robert. As noted with Sylvie’s name, highly relevant to her adventurous character in *Housekeeping*, here too, Lila’s name—perhaps referring to the lilac flower with its symbolism of spirituality and renewal—is also significant. *Lila* tells the same incidents as *Gilead* and *Home* but from the eponymous character’s own point of view; the incidents of the three novels parallel each other and are set in the fictional town of Gilead in the 1950s. Before marrying Reverend Ames, Lila’s life has been wild and nomadic in nature as she was brought up by the itinerant Doll after Doll kidnapped her at the age of four or five to protect her from the carelessness of her family. This is the first normative assumption that Robinson deconstructs in the novel: the long-held notion that houses are always safe and that the outside world is always insecure and full of perils. It is the same idea held by the grandmother in *Housekeeping* for she believes that as long as she has a house with a roof, she and her daughters will be safe. John Ames supports this idea in *Gilead* when he asks himself: “[W]hat birds did before there were telephone wires. It would have been much harder for them to roost in the sunlight, which is a thing they clearly enjoy doing” (187-188). Here he implies that birds must have a settling place instead of wandering and flying all day. In *Lila*, Robinson deconstructs this idea of domesticity safeguarding security because Lila is shown to be insecure in her house with her family, and as having felt more secure in the wilderness with the old woman Doll. Again with Lila, as with Sylvie, Robinson is reclaiming the canonical American story of the mobile frontiersman/pioneer/adventurer. Putting women centre stage, she is reformulating the ‘lighting out’ plot in which men escape the constraints of femininity.

When Lila marries John Ames, her life completely changes from being the wild Lila who wanders from one place to the other, to being the domestic wife and mother who is supposed to stay at home most of the time—according to the standards of the moral, pious and respectable wife at that time. Yet, Lila cannot forget her wild and nomadic Pre-Gilead past. She keeps remembering it and compares it to her unfavourable domestic present. Throughout the novel, Lila tries to reconcile these two lives. After becoming a wife to John Ames, the first place that attracted the attention of Lila was the garden because it reminds her of that wild part of herself:

Now that she was the Reverend's wife she had made the garden much bigger. She could get all the seeds she wanted. She still liked to eat a carrot right out of the ground, but she knew that wasn't what people did, so she was careful about it. She thought sometime she might just let the boy try it, to see how it tasted. (Two or three times she had even had the thought of stealing him, carrying him away to the woods or off down the road so she could have him to herself and let him know about that *other life* (16-17, my italics).

The garden is significant here as it represents an in-between area between the domestic and the public. Commenting on its significance, Annette Kolodny argues in *The Land Before Her* that American women have come to regard the home and the surrounding garden as their own: '[T]he newly self-conscious American Eve proclaimed a paradise in which the garden and the home were one' (6). Lila pays the garden great attention and regards it as an extension to her house. It reminds her of her life in the wilderness. Indeed, Lila is always longing for this 'other life' of wandering and of being free and liberated outside the confines of social norms. She wants to carry her son away to the wilderness to try this life. However, Lila cannot do that and escape because she cannot break her husband's heart. John Ames himself knows of this wild nature of Lila and he implicitly refers to Lila when he likens her to a bird. The narrator comments:

He told her once when there was a storm a bird had flown into the house. He'd never seen one like it. The wind must have carried it in from some far-off place. He opened all the doors and windows, but it was so desperate to escape that for a while it couldn't find a way out. "It left a blessing in the house," he said. "The wildness of it. Bringing the wind inside." (19)

Here John Ames hints to Lila that she is free to leave the house, although his personal inclination is that she stays and conveys some of her wildness into their domestic life. This is

a clear example where Robinson rejects the polarisation of domesticity and wilderness. The narrator remarks that although Lila's son attaches her more to the domestic life with which she is less than comfortable, still she keeps her wildness: 'Now that there might be a child she'd best try to act like she belonged there, at least for a while. Her hands still smelled like river water, and her hair. She still felt a little more like who she was. That was a help' (23). Lila tries to find a compromise between her domestic present and her wild past by looking into the similarities between the two spheres. She looks after the house garden and grows many of her favourite plants; she also finds Gilead itself something of a wild town with its big trees. For Lila, Gilead 'wasn't such a bad place. The trees were big enough that it was almost like living in the woods. There was no reason not to make another garden. She could plant some flowers' (24).

It is significant that Robinson's insistence on the deconstruction of the wilderness/domesticity dualism stems from her religious faith. It is also related to her deconstruction of the transcendence/immanence dualism as discussed in the previous chapter. For Robinson, God manifests Himself in every single part of nature, not only in churches or piously observant homes. In her essay 'Psalm Eight', she states: 'So I have spent my life watching, not to see beyond the world, merely to see, great mystery, what is plainly before my eyes. I think the concept of transcendence is based on a misreading of creation. With all respect to heaven, the scene of miracle is here among us' (243). In her essay 'Wilderness', Robinson writes extensively about her conceptualisation of wilderness as being another home to her, as one never polarised with the domestic sphere. She admits: 'I am an American of the kind whose family sought out wilderness generation after generation' (246). Robinson adds in the same essay: 'My bond with my native landscape was an unnamable yearning, *to be at home in it*, to be chastened and acceptable, to be present in it as if I were not present at all' (246, my italics). Robinson believes that wilderness provides people, especially women, some sort of liberation away from the confining boundaries of domesticity. She argues that '[w]ilderness is where things can be hidden, from foreign enemies, perhaps, but certainly from domestic critics. [...] Wilderness is where things can be done that would be intolerable in a populous landscape' ('Wilderness' 246-247). Robinson's reconfiguration of the wilderness as a socially constructed space that needs to be contested via a feminist lens echoes Donna Haraway's idea of nature as a social construction that needs to be given a new value: '[Nature] is a figure, construction, artefact, movement, displacement' ('The Promises of Monsters' 65).

Lila's wandering in the wilderness is related to her quest for God. Although she is not religious in the narrow sense of the word, she has more faith than those who go to churches regularly. She tells John Ames, "I don't understand theology. I don't think I like it. Lots of folks live and die and never worry themselves about it" (101). Doll is one of those who have great belief in God without knowing anything about the ideology of religion. It is her existence in the creation which brings her very close to God. She is described in the novel as 'an angel in the wilderness' who saved Lila's life (30). Even her act of bathing Lila in the river and cleaning her body is given a religious dimension when it is likened to the act of baptism, something Lila is more comfortable with than when Ames baptises her in the proper religious way. When Doll was cleaning Lila's body she used to say: 'Now you're just as clean as a body can be' (37). In his letter to Lila before they get married, John Ames stresses this idea of the faith of God which stems from experience rather than theoretical knowledge, '*You must have thought that it has never occurred to me to wonder about the deeper things religion is really concerned with, the meaning of existence, of human life. You must have thought I say the things I do out of habit and custom, rather than from experience and reflection. I admit there is some truth in this. It is inevitable, I suppose*' (74, original italics). Lila copies these words more than once because they touch her heart deeply and prove to her that she and Doll are religious persons by experience not by theology. Ames also writes to Lila that:

[T]here's no such thing as safety. Existence can be fierce, she did know that. A storm can blow up out of a quiet day, wind that takes your life out of your hands, your soul out of your body. *The fire went up and down among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning. And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning.* She had copied this fifteen times. It reminded her of the wildness of things. In that quiet house she was afraid she might forget. (106, original italics)

Here Robinson disrupts the idea that safety is found in homes, and that God's Providence exists within the walls of homes only. For Robinson, fire can threaten the home too, while God's Providence exists everywhere, even in the wilderness, because God sends his angels—like Doll—to save His people. This is evident in the Biblical story of Ezekiel which Robinson keeps alluding to in *Lila*. Lila copies these words from the Bible:

And as for thy nativity, in the day thou wast born thy navel was not cut, neither wast thou washed in water to cleanse thee [...]; but thou wast cast out in the open field, for

that thy person was abhorred, in the day that thou wast born. And when I passed by thee, and saw thee weltering in thy blood, I said unto thee, Though thou art in thy blood, live; yea, I said unto thee, Though thou art in thy blood, live (42-43, original italics)

What Lila likes in this Biblical story is how God saved the people of Israel with His Providence although they were wandering in the wilderness with no homes to shelter them. She juxtaposes this story with the Biblical story of Job who was a good man who had a good life in a safe house and suddenly lost it all along with all of his children. Lila copies the following words:

And, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead. She'd heard of that happening, plenty of times. A wind could hit a town like Gilead and leave nothing behind but sticks and stumps. You'd think a man as careful as this Job might have had a storm cellar. (175, original italics)

These Biblical allusions strengthen Robinson's narrative view that there is no such thing as safety inside houses and unsafety in the wilderness. God's Providence exists everywhere as God manifests Himself in the creation; and to be at home with the whole world is to feel God's presence all the time. This is one of Robinson's purposes in deconstructing the public/private dualism in *Lila*. Here it might seem that, in *Housekeeping*, Robinson's main purpose in deconstructing the public/private dualism is related to feminist issues, that is, to challenging traditional patriarchal gender roles. Yet, in *Lila*, Robinson broadens out from feminist imperatives to tackle issues related to theology, proving herself as an ecotheologist more than an ecofeminist, although one cannot separate her ecofeminism from her ecotheology, also still encompassing feminism, as it is her earlier ecofeminist position which leads her to embrace this position of ecotheology in her later life.

Conclusion

In sum, both Walker and Robinson set out to deconstruct the public/private dualism in their fiction. Walker focuses on the redefinition of the public sphere as it is the sphere from which black American people, especially women, were denied access for a long time. *Meridian* centres on a life of public sphere activism, based on the rejection of conventional domesticity, and the protagonist's eventual discovery of both the costs of evacuating the personal and a new unity with the world. In *The Color Purple*, she confers on the public

sphere a new meaning of self-assertiveness and agency as is the case with Celie's journey to self and voice. In almost all her fiction, Walker finds spiritual wholeness and holiness in the world as the solution to end all kinds of dualisms and oppressions. This spiritual purpose is somewhat similar to Robinson's aim in deconstructing the public/private dualism and redefining the wilderness as a female space of liberty and security. Yet, Robinson's spirituality differs from that of Walker as it is based chiefly on Christian theology, while Walker's spirituality accommodates a wider range of religious and restorative practices. The following chapter on the deconstruction of the (wo)man/animal dualism further consolidates Alice Walker's spiritual ecofeminist stance as well as taking up Toni Morrison's narrative explorations once more.

CHAPTER THREE: Feminism and the Deconstruction of the (Wo)Man/Animal Dualism

The animals of the world exist for their own reasons. They were not made for humans any more than black people were made for whites or women for men

Alice Walker²⁹

Introduction:

In this quotation, Alice Walker brilliantly captures the essence of ecofeminist thought with regard to the relationship between women and animals, the core theme of this chapter. As indicated in the Introduction to this thesis, after the pervasive influence of post-structuralism in the 1960s, feminists made good use of post-structuralist thought, especially Derrida's deconstruction, as a means to facilitate the dismantling of the long-held Western dualisms that have shaped the relationship between women and nature. This chapter is concerned with analysing the relationship between women and animals from an ecofeminist perspective, both in philosophical terms and in terms of literary representations of human/animal relations. It examines how feminists in general and ecofeminists in particular benefited from post-structuralist and deconstructionist practices to challenge the human/animal dualism in general and the woman/animal dualism in particular. I will explore the main ideas of post-structuralist theorists and philosophers—those of Jacques Derrida, Donna Haraway, Bruno Latour, Rosi Braidotti, Timothy Morton, and others—who have provided the means for feminist and ecofeminist critics, theorists, philosophers, and literary writers to deconstruct the metaphysical relationship between women and animals—that was based on duality—and to reconstruct a new relationship compatible with the thinking of the post-modernist and post-structuralist era. To further this work, in this chapter I will look at the novels *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and *Beloved* (1987) by Toni Morrison and *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989) and the short story 'Am I Blue?' (1986) by Alice Walker.

The question of the animal and the distinction between animals and humans in general, and animals and women in particular, is an interdisciplinary one. It has been tackled by theorists and activists in almost all disciplines across the humanities and social sciences. Matthew Calarco contends that “[a]nimal Studies,” or “human-animal studies” (as it is

²⁹These words come from Alice Walker's 'Foreword' as she sums up the heart of Marjorie Spiegel's book *The Dreaded Comparison* (14).

sometimes called), comprises a wide range of disciplines within the humanities, social sciences, and biological and cognitive sciences' (2). According to Calarco,

[t]here is no standard or widely accepted definition of the field, and its main terms and theoretical foci are still open-ended at this point. I would suggest, however, that the main stakes of the field lie in the effort to place questions concerning animals at the center of critical inquiry. The precise manner in which these questions are framed, debated, and answered, depends, of course, to a large extent on the particular field of origin. (2)

This chapter therefore considers the human/animal distinction from philosophical, critical, and literary perspectives. It is divided into two sections. The first section comprises a discussion of some philosophical and critical theoretical views that have provided the means for feminists to challenge the woman/animal dualism; the second section explores how those philosophical and critical views are able to open up new understanding of interaction between women and animals in the literary works of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker.

Women and Animals: Philosophical Views:

Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan in their introduction to *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations* state that:

It could be argued that theorizing about animals is inevitable for feminism. Historically, the ideological justification for women's alleged inferiority has been made by appropriating them to animals: from Aristotle on, women's bodies have been seen to intrude upon their rationality. Since rationality has been construed by most Western theorists as the defining requirement for membership in the moral community, women—along with nonwhite men and animals—were long excluded. (1)

Carol Adams also reinforces this idea in her *Neither Man Nor Beast: Feminism and the Defense of Animals* when she maintains that '[h]istorically [...] women were positioned in between man and other animals, so that women, and especially women of color, were traditionally viewed in Western culture as neither man nor beast' (11). Ecofeminist theorist and activist Karen J. Warren shares the same line of thought that women have been historically related to animals. She maintains in her introduction to the edited book *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature* that '[w]omen are described in animal terms as pets, cows, sows, foxes, chicks, serpents, bitches, beavers, old bats, old hens, mother hens, pussy cats, cats, cheetahs, birdbrains, and harebrains' (12).

Although these theorists admit the historical relationship between women and animals from Aristotle on, they imply that this relationship has always taken a pejorative form. Indeed, Aristotle placed women between men and animals in a hierarchy on the basis of their presumed lack of rationality and good sense. French philosopher, mathematician, and scientist René Descartes (1596-1650) helped establish the belittling relationship between women and animals in Western philosophy through his famous cogito argument that, in identifying the human as exclusively associated with rational thinking would therefore, as woman became identified with the body, thereby guarantee the perception of women as female animals. In *Discourse on the Method of Reasoning* (1637), Descartes articulated his conception of the mind/body or rationality/feeling dualism which henceforth encouraged many philosophers and thinkers to relate women negatively to the realm of animality in order to banish both women and animals from the male realm of rationality, reason, and good sense. He postulates: ‘I observed that this truth, I think, therefore I am (COGITO ERGO SUM), was so certain and of such evidence that no ground of doubt, however extravagant, could be alleged by the sceptics capable of shaking it’ (15).

Kant too followed Descartes in his negation of the full significance of feelings and senses in human cognition. If a human being is a rational entity endowed with a capacity for reason, and if women are traditionally regarded as emotional beings, he too effectively casts women into the realm of animality. In *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), Kant differentiates between ‘persons’ whom he defines as beings that have reason and, thus, exist as an end in themselves and ‘things’ that do not have reason and only exist as a means to serve rational beings. According to Kant, ‘[b]eings the existence of which rests not on our will but on nature, if they are beings without reason, [they] still have only a relative worth, as means, and therefore [are] called *things*, whereas rational beings are called *persons* because their nature already marks them out as an end in itself’ (37, original italics). Thus, according to the metaphysical concept of rationality, Kant implicitly regards both women and animals as ‘things’ that do not deserve to be ‘persons’ or full humans.

Feminist Responses to the Woman/Animal Dualism:

Inheriting such negative connotations relating women to animals, first- and early second-wave feminists set out to challenge the purported identification of women with animals. They believed that in that way they might attach themselves to the realm of rationality and reason. This repudiation of any women-animals connection is the first feminist

stance that Adams and Donovan refer to when they state that ‘[a]t least three responses to this historical alignment of women and animals have appeared in feminist theory’ (1). Mary Wollstonecraft and Simone de Beauvoir are seen to typify this first feminist stance towards animals. They believe that it denigrates women to liken them to animals. Wollstonecraft argues that women must cultivate their minds and suppress their feelings in order to be part of the human—mainly masculine—kingdom and separate from the animal kingdom. At the beginning of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft maintains that if her attempt to cultivate her mind will mean she is accused of masculinisation, then she prefers being masculine to being an animal. She states:

I shall most cordially join in the cry; but if it be, against the imitation of many virtues, or more properly speaking, the attainment of these talents and virtues, the exercise of which ennobles the human character, and *which raise females in the scale of animal being*, when they are comprehensively termed mankind—all those who view them with a philosophical eye must, I should think, wish with me, that they may everyday grow more and more masculine. (22, my italics)

According to Wollstonecraft, being described as masculine in her attempt to acquire the talents and virtues possessed by men—rationality, reason, education, and the like—is preferable to being described as an animal (or lower on the animal scale). It is important, however, to consider further what Wollstonecraft might mean by ‘animality’. Animality, for Wollstonecraft, is evidently the opposite of rationality. It means all kinds of feelings, impulses and emotions, even those emotions felt by a mother for her baby. Wollstonecraft refuses marriage because it makes ‘mere animals’ of women (30). She believes that the only solution for women to rise ‘above the animal kingdom’ is to cultivate their minds (113). Education, according to Wollstonecraft, is a means to rid the woman of her ‘animal spirits’. The phrase ‘animal spirits’ is repeated in Wollstonecraft’s text (pp. 253, 294, 379, 395, 431, and 725). Importantly, by ‘animal spirits’ she means all that is opposed to reason, not only animals.

Like most liberal feminists, Simone de Beauvoir later follows the same line of thought as Wollstonecraft in attempting to bring women closer to the masculine sphere and therefore further from the animal sphere. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir equates nature in general with the body. As an intrinsic part of nature, animals are used to signify the body for Beauvoir. According to Beauvoir, woman serves ‘as intermediary between man and the world’ (175). Woman, for her, is believed to be the other of man. This is why ‘she must incarnate’ everything man excludes, at the top of which is animality, or the body.

The second feminist stance, according to Adams and Donovan is the affirmation of the woman-animal connection from a positive perspective. Adams and Donovan maintain that this stance—which appeared in the late 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s—was exemplified by many feminist theorists such as Rosemary Radford Ruether, Marilyn French, and Elizabeth Spelman (2). The third stance, for Adams and Donovan, ‘asserts that feminist theory has nothing to do with animals’ (3). This chapter’s focus overlaps with the first and the second stances as they describe.

Postmodern Humanism vs. Metaphysical Humanism:

Before discussing the second approach—in which feminists begin to connect themselves to animals in an affirmative way, without feeling offended or humiliated by such a connection—however, it is useful once again to offer some overview of philosophical and theoretical insights that provided insights enabling later feminist thinkers to achieve a critical stance able to begin to break down the women/animals borders and their negative implications. As stated in the Introduction, the pervasive spread of post-structuralism in the 1960s challenged and reshaped critical aspects of classical and metaphysical Western thought. Challenging all forms of long-held dualisms either by inversion or subversion was one of the main objectives of post-structuralist critics. It was the deconstruction of the human/animal dualism that led feminists to dismantle the woman/animal dualism. Thus, the following section will be dedicated to examining post-structuralist philosophical attempts to challenge the human/animal dualism. This examination cannot be grounded without briefly considering the philosophical thinking of Derrida regarding this issue. Derrida will be the point of departure for two main reasons. The first is that Derrida’s larger philosophical project of deconstructing all kinds of binarisms and logocentrisms seeks to deconstruct the metaphysical concept of ‘subjectivity’. Deconstructing the traditional concept of the subject opened the way for Derrida and many other philosophers that followed him to challenge the subject/object binary and, consequently, to deconstruct the human/animal dualism which, in its turn, gave way to the theory of posthumanism. The second reason is that Derrida is not only concerned with the issue of deconstructing dualisms in general, but is concerned with the ‘question of the animal’ in particular. In his work ‘The Animal That Therefore I Am’ (1997), Derrida states that:

The question of the living and of the living animal [...] will always have been the most important and decisive question. I have addressed it a thousand times, either directly

or obliquely, by means of readings of all the philosophers I have taken an interest in.
(402)

Derrida: Questioning the Concept of the Human:

Derrida's philosophical thinking with regard to the issue of the animal can be traced throughout his work as essential to his oeuvre. As a post-structuralist thinker, Derrida is one of the pioneering philosophers who began to question the concept of the 'human' as defined by classical and metaphysical philosophers and theorists such as Aristotle, Descartes, and Kant (all of whom define the human being as a rational being who is endowed with a capacity for thinking). In this tradition, built on polarities and dualisms, everything that is not possessed with rationality is regarded as a non-human other: women, nature, animals, things, slaves, and even children. Post-structuralists react against this narrow and reductive meaning of 'humanity' and hence announce themselves as anti-humanists. Rosi Braidotti comments on this idea in her work, *The Posthuman*, stating that '[p]osthumanism emerged as the rallying cry of this generation of radical thinkers who later were to become world-famous as the 'post-structuralist' generation' (23). According to Braidotti, '[a]nti-humanism criticizes the implicit assumptions about the human subject that are upheld by the humanist image of Man' (30). Matthew Calarco shares the same premise with Braidotti when he argues that '[i]n recent years, traditional human-animal distinctions, which posit a radical discontinuity between animals and human beings, have been relentlessly attacked from multiple theoretical, political, and disciplinary perspectives' (3).

Derrida's rejection of the metaphysical concept of man first manifests itself in his *Of Grammatology*. He maintains that in metaphysical philosophy, '[m]an *calls himself* man only by drawing limits excluding his other from the play of supplementarity: the purity of nature, of animality, primitiveness, childhood, madness, divinity' (244, original italics). Derrida calls this 'the play of presence and absence' (244). He means that if rationality is present in a certain being, then he is called man; if it is absent, then this being is called anything else rather than man, such as nature, animal, primitive, child, mad, etc. Derrida puts it more clearly when he argues that, according to the criteria of metaphysical thought, 'the term "human" gains sense only in relation to a series of excluded terms and identities, foremost among them nature and animality' (*Of Grammatology* 104).

Derrida's deconstruction of the concept of the human or man cannot be fully understood without broadly relating it to his deconstruction of the subject. On a larger scale,

Derrida challenges the metaphysics of subjectivity, which is unfairly confined to humans. In his interview with Jean-Luc Nancy, he maintains that ‘the subject can be re-interpreted, restored, re-inscribed’ (97). According to Derrida, the centrality and hegemony of the subject must be displaced because it is this centrality which creates and perpetuates the peripherality and otherness of the object. Deconstructing and displacing the subject is a crucial step in the process of disrupting the traditional notion of the human versus the animal. Once the subject is problematised, the human is no longer reductively defined by the metaphysical, unjust ‘forms of marking’ such as rationality and speech. Derrida contends that:

The idea according to which man is the only speaking being [. . .] seems to me at once undisplaceable and highly problematic. Of course, if one defines language in such a way that is reserved for what we call man, what is there to say? But if one reinscribes language in a network of possibilities that do not merely encompass it but mark it irreducibly from the inside, everything changes. I am thinking in particular of the mark in general, of the trace, of iterability, of *différance*. These possibilities or necessities, without which there would be no language, are *themselves not only human*. (‘Eating Well’ 116, original italics)

Here Derrida proposes his concept of *différance* or indeterminacy of possibilities as a means to overcome binarism and a narrow definition of language. When the human is not defined by definite marks, the ‘binary opposition between the human and the infra-human’ will come to an end (‘Eating Well’ 116).

Having deconstructed the metaphysical concepts of subjectivity and humanism, Derrida moves on to question the human/animal dualism more directly. In ‘The Animal That Therefore I Am’, Derrida proposes to limit ‘the rupture or abyss between this “I-we” and what we *call* animals’ (398, original italics). Not only does he problematise the concept of ‘man’, but he also problematises the concept of ‘animal’. He points out that animals are appropriated ‘each time a philosopher, or anyone else says, “the Animal” in the singular and without further ado, claiming thus to designate every living thing that is held not to be man (man as *rational* animal, man as political animal, speaking animal)’ (399-400, original italics). He adds that ‘[a]nimal is a word that men have given themselves the right to give’ (400, original italics). Derrida implies that humans have labelled non-human beings as ‘animals’ in order to manifest their superiority over them. Moreover, using the word ‘animal’ as a generic word in the singular is oppressive in itself because this homogenisation makes it easier for humans to manipulate non-humans. Derrida argues:

Confined within this catch-all concept, within this vast encampment of the animal in this general singular, within the strict enclosure of this definite article (“the Animal” and not “animals,” [...] are *all the living things* that man does not recognize as his fellows, his neighbors, or his brothers. (402, original italics)

In his work *The Beast and the Sovereign*—a compilation of Derrida’s teaching lectures and seminars from 2001 to 2003—he continues to dedicate himself more directly to examining the question of the animal. He states that ‘[t]he question of the animal was also, here and elsewhere, one of our permanent concerns’ (1). By the ‘beast’, Derrida means the ‘feminine’; and by the ‘sovereign’ he means the ‘masculine’ (1). Therefore, it is now clear that Derrida is not only concerned with dismantling the human/animal dualism, but he is also concerned with dismantling the man/woman dualism. According to Derrida, the title ‘The Beast and the Sovereign’ involves ‘alliance or hostility’ ‘not only between the types of living beings (animal and human) but between two sexes’ (2).

Derrida’s Disciples: Haraway, Latour, Braidotti, and Morton:

As one of the most influential figures in recent Continental philosophy, Derrida opened the door for a wide array of other philosophers, theorists, and activists from different disciplines to question the human/animal dualism. Donna J. Haraway is one of Derrida’s distinguished posthumanist disciples. Haraway acknowledges her debt to Derrida when she says at the beginning of *When Species Meet* (2008): ‘because of Derrida’s commitment to track down “the whole anthropomorphic reinstitution of the superiority of the human order over the animal order, of the law over the living,” he is my guide’ (11). In her work *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (1991), a compilation of ten essays that Haraway wrote between 1978 and 1989, she follows Derrida in questioning the human/animal dualism. She believes that it is ‘the subject-object split that has legitimated our logics of domination of nature and ourselves’ (19). According to Haraway, ‘[t]hrough classifying by naming, by creating kinds, culture would then be the logical domination of a necessary but dangerous instinctual nature’ (22). Haraway maintains that humans like to distinguish animals from their own selves in order to instrumentalise them. Humans, for Haraway, use animals as mirrors to reflect their own superiority when compared to the primitiveness and bestiality of animals. The more animals are constructed as primitive, the more humans will appear as cultured and advanced through their deviation from non-human nature. She maintains: ‘we polish an animal mirror to look for ourselves [...]. The issue rests

on our skill in the construction of mirrors' (21). Haraway brilliantly uses the term "cyborg" as a way to break the nature/culture dualism and, consequently, transgress the human/animal dualism. She maintains:

The cyborg appears in myth precisely where the boundary between human and animal is transgressed. Far from signaling a walling off of people from other living beings, cyborgs signal disturbing and pleurably tight coupling. Bestiality has a new status in this cycle of marriage exchange. (152)

As indicated in the Introduction to the thesis, Haraway employs the term "cyborg" as a means to transgress the nature/culture dualism in general. The cyborg has an in-between status between culture and nature as it is a combination of 'cybernetics'—which represent culture with all its sophistication and technology—and 'organisms'—which represent nature. Haraway continues her posthumanist and anti-anthropomorphic project in her book *When Species Meet*. As the title of the book suggests, this is an attempt to break the boundaries between the different species. She points out in the introduction to her book that '[t]his book is an acknowledgement of the lively knottings that tie together the world I inhabit' (vii). Haraway calls this breaking of boundaries between species 'intra-and interaction' (4). She adds: 'I am vastly outnumbered by my tiny companions; better put, I become an adult human being in company with these tiny messmates. To be one is always to *become with many*' (4, original italics). Here Haraway disrupts the metaphysical concept of the human. Unlike Kant who believes that the human being exists for itself and by itself—as indicated above—Haraway argues that the human being cannot reach fullness and maturity without the 'companions' of the different species that surround him in the world.

Bruno Latour is similarly also one of the most distinguished posthumanist philosophers, part of a group undoubtedly influenced by Derrida's re-definition of humanism. In his *We Have Never Been Modern* (1991), Latour challenges the modernist concept of man as a monolithic entity, which is based on a total separation between humans and animals or between culture and nature. This leads Latour to announce that we have never been modern. His main hypothesis in this work

is that the word 'modern' designates two sets of entirely different practices which must remain distinct if they are to remain effective, but have recently come to be confused. The first set of practices, by 'translation', creates mixtures between entirely new types of beings, hybrids of nature and culture. The second, by 'purification', creates two entirely distinct ontological zones: that of human beings on the one hand; that of nonhumans on the other. (10-11)

By ‘translation’ Latour means ‘mediation’ and interaction (*We Have Never Been Modern* 12), whereas he uses the word ‘purification’ to refer to the modernist stance of the ‘separation’ between nature and culture or between humans and non-humans. According to Latour,

Modernity is often defined in terms of humanism, either as a way of saluting the birth of ‘man’ or as a way of announcing his death. But this habit itself is modern, because it remains asymmetrical. It overlooks the simultaneous birth of ‘nonhumanity’—things, or objects, or beasts—and the equally strange beginning of a crossed-out God, relegated to the sidelines. (*We Have Never Been Modern* 13)

In Latour’s view, the boundaries between humans and non-humans must be blurred in order to escape the confining circle of metaphysics. In the post-human era, humans and non-humans must co-exist in a world of ‘networks’. ‘Networks’ is a recurrent keyword in almost all Latour’s writings. It signifies his anti-anthropomorphic stance and his attempt to de-centre the human subject of metaphysical modernity. Instead of a subject/object polarisation, Latour suggests that humans and non-humans must be ‘conjoined’ by means of mediation. The terms ‘subject’ and ‘object’ are not valid anymore; the word ‘mediators’ or “collectives” must be used instead to refer to both humans and non-humans without implying any stratification or hierarchy (*We Have Never Been Modern* 139).

In an echo of Derrida and Haraway, Latour re-defines and challenges the reductionist metaphysical concept of humanism. He states that:

Modern humanists are reductionist because they seek to attribute action to a small number of powers, leaving the rest of the world with nothing but simple mute forces. It is true that by redistributing the action among all these mediators we lose the reduced form of humanity, but we gain another form, which has to be called irreducible. (*We Have Never Been Modern* 138)

Like Haraway, Latour believes that the human cannot reach maturity ‘unless the other part of itself, the share of things, is restored to it. So long as humanism is constructed through contrast with the object that has been abandoned to epistemology, neither the human nor the non-human can be understood’ (*We Have Never Been Modern* 136). In his more recent work, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns* (2012), Latour develops his idea of humans and non-humans as ‘collectives’ who co-exist in a ‘network’. He argues that ‘[b]y using the term COLLECTIVE, as we have done up to now, instead of speaking of “culture,” “society,” or “civilization,” we have already been able to emphasize the operation of gathering or composing, while simultaneously stressing the heterogeneity of the beings thus assembled’ (296). This idea of assemblage, whilst retaining heterogeneity, is

crucial in Latour's thought. Although Latour suggests that humans and non-humans must be assimilated into a collective, he insists that they must keep their singular autonomous variations in order not to lose themselves within each other. This is what he calls 'a *weaving* of threads whose origins are necessarily varied' (296, original italics).

Significantly, this development in the philosophical thinking of Latour leads to the articulation of his influential theory of 'entanglement'. Latour contends that 'we're going to have to take into account even more *entanglements* involving beings that will conflate the order of Nature with the order of Society' (*An Inquiry into Modes of Existence* 10, my italics). Entanglement of different domains, for Latour,

allows the analyst as much freedom as that of the actors in the weaving of their worlds; it frees the field entirely from its organization into domains. Especially when we learn to liberate ourselves from some supposedly uncrossable borders [...] between nature and culture, for example, or power and reason, the human and the nonhuman, the abstract and the concrete. (62)

So, in a similar vein, Rosi Braidotti calls for a re-consideration of the metaphysical concept of the human and celebrates posthumanism as a distinctive feature of the postmodern era. In her book *The Posthuman* (2013), Braidotti postulates that:

Not all of us can say, with any degree of certainty, that we have always been human, or that we are only that. Some of us are not even considered fully human now [...]. Not if by 'human' we mean that creature familiar to us from the Enlightenment and its legacy: 'the Cartesian subject of the cogito, the Kantian "community of reasonable beings"'. (1)

According to Braidotti too, the reductive meaning of the human as a rational being as proposed by Descartes and Kant must be re-defined. She argues that 'this approach, which rests on the binary opposition between the given and the constructed, is currently being replaced by a non-dualistic understanding of nature-culture interaction' (3). Braidotti uses the term 'continuum' to refer to this nature-culture interaction, in which the natural and cultural distinctions are blurred (2). This nature-culture continuum is the starting point of her posthumanist position.

Posthumanism, for Braidotti, is not only a means to break the boundaries between humans and non-humans; it is also a 'scheme of thought' which puts an end to differences and otherness such as 'the sexualized other (woman), the racialized other (the native) and the naturalized other (animals, the environment or earth). These others were constitutive in that they fulfilled a mirror function that confirmed the Same in His superior position' (*The*

Posthuman 27-28). Braidotti's idea of otherness that functions as a reflective mirror for the superiority of metaphysical 'man' echoes the words of Derrida, Haraway, and Latour, as outlined above.

Timothy Morton's philosophical work on the relationship between culture and nature in general, and between humans and non-humans in particular, is also a crucial step in advancing posthumanism. In his book *The Ecological Thought* (2010), Morton declares the death of the metaphysical concept of 'ghostly Nature' which 'was always over yonder, alien and alienated. Just like a reflection, we can never actually reach it and touch it and belong to it' and uses 'ecology' instead (5). According to him, '[e]cology includes all the ways we imagine how we live together. Ecology is profoundly about coexistence. Existence is always coexistence. No man is an island. Human beings need each other as much as they need an environment' (4). As in the writing of the above-discussed philosophers and theorists, Morton too seeks a revised version of humanism in which man is no longer the centre of the universe. According to Morton's posthumanism, man can never be a real person as long as he is 'one'. He adds that '[i]n an age of ecology without Nature, we could treat many more beings as people while deconstructing our ideas about what counts as people' (8). Here Morton is calling for a re-definition of peoplehood or personhood. For Morton, not all human beings are persons or people and vice versa; there are beings that we can regard 'as people even when they aren't people' (8). What determines whether a certain being is a person or not, for Morton, is to what extent it is interconnected with other beings surrounding it. This is what Morton calls 'the mesh' (15). Morton prefers the word 'mesh' to 'internet-like' words such as 'network' and 'web' because, for him, the term is livelier and shorter (28). He defines 'mesh' as 'a complex situation or series of events in which a person is entangled; a concatenation of constraining or restricting forces or circumstances; a snare. In other words, it's perfect' (28).

In sum, there are two key points to draw out of the above theoretical framing and that are particularly relevant to the argument being advanced here. The first is the insistence on the inter-connectedness between humans and non-humans. In their attempt to deconstruct the human/animal dualism, all the above-explored philosophers and theorists seek to re-define the concept of the human in order to transgress the reductionist bracketing that separates humans and non-humans. Derrida's '*différance*' here functions in the way of Haraway's 'cyborg', Latour's 'entanglement' or 'collective', Braidotti's 'continuum', and Morton's 'mesh'. The second point is that of otherness. These philosophers argue that the main reason for metaphysical humanism's insistence on separating humans and animals is that animals serve as an Other, a reflection, or a mirror that represents how much humans deviate from

animality and bestiality. It is from this notion of ‘othering’ that feminists start to adopt a postmodern posthumanist position, which is the main focus of the following section.

Posthumanist Feminism: Intersectionality and the Deconstruction of the Woman/Animal Dualism:

After accepting the afore-mentioned philosophical and critical views regarding a re-definition and a re-consideration of metaphysical humanism to end anthropocentrism, posthumanist feminists began to realise that it is not only anthropocentrism that needs to be challenged, but also androcentrism. These feminists also regard Derrida’s deconstruction of the human/animal and the subject/object dualisms as the taking off point in their struggle to end women’s oppression. One of the main ways that feminists seek to end otherness and to break down the woman/animal dualism is to end the subject/object dualism. According to Latour in his *The Politics of Nature* (1999),

Humans and nonhumans for their part can join forces without requiring their counterparts on the other side to disappear. To put it yet another way: *objects and subjects can never associate with one another; humans and nonhumans can*. As soon as we stop taking nonhumans as objects, as soon as we allow them to enter the collective in the form of new entities with uncertain boundaries, entities that hesitate, quake, and induce perplexity, it is not hard to see that we can grant them the designation of actors. (76, original italics)

Latour believes that women, animals, and other marginalised groups must be seen as subjects, as ‘actants’ who are able to perform actions (*The Politics of Nature* 75). Men must stop regarding these groups as objects and they must exchange roles with them as ‘full-fledged actors’ (*The Politics of Nature* 81). As a posthumanist feminist, Braidotti also believes that ending all kinds of ‘otherness’ must be feminism’s main aim. She contends that one of metaphysical humanism’s long-held binaries is that of subjectivity/otherness. The subject is recognised as the rational human being, whereas others are ‘the sexualized, racialized, and naturalized others, who are reduced to the less than human status of disposable bodies’ (*The Posthuman* 15). Rationality is patriarchy’s main justification for oppressing women, animals, and other marginalised entities, and, consequently, objectifying them. In her book *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason*, ecofeminist Val Plumwood states:

In the historical rationalist imaginary, women and other ‘lesser beings’ are the Others of reason, which is treated as the province of elite men who are above the base material sphere of daily life and are entitled to transcend it because of their greater

share of Reason. It is not only women that have been constructed as oppositional to western rationality, culture and philosophy, but also the slave, the animal, and the barbarian, all associated with the body and the whole constructed sphere of physicality and materiality. (19)

Feminist Carol J. Adams introduces the concept and process of ‘objectification’ of both women and animals. In her *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (1990), Adams’ main premise is that the treatment of animals as objects is parallel to patriarchal society’s objectification of women and other marginalised groups. Adams proposes ‘a cycle of objectification, fragmentation, and consumption’ (73). According to Adams, the three stages of objectification, fragmentation, and consumption constitute the process of exploitation of both women and animals. ‘Objectification,’ for Adams,

permits an oppressor to view another being as an object. The oppressor then violates this being by object-like treatment: e.g., the rape of women that denies women freedom to say no, or the butchering of animals that converts animals from living breathing beings into dead objects. (73)

Adams postulates that first objectified, then fragmented, and finally consumed, ‘the object is severed from its ontological meaning [...] it exists only through what it represents’ (73). She implies that when women and animals are objectified, they are denied all subjectivity, agency, and even ontological being. This echoes the thought of Derrida and Latour in their questioning of the subject/object dualism.

In the postmodern era, feminists have become aware that all kinds of oppression are intertwined and interlocked and that they cannot simply end androcentrism without ending all other kinds of “centrism”. In her article ‘Androcentrism and Anthropocentrism: Parallels and Politics’, Val Plumwood points out that ‘[c]oncepts of centrism have been at the heart of modern liberation politics and theory’ (328). She suggests that in order to liberate women from the tyranny of androcentrism, feminists must therefore liberate non-whites from the tyranny of ethnocentrism, liberate non-Europeans from the tyranny of Eurocentrism, and liberate nature from the tyranny of anthropocentrism. Thus, all kinds of oppression must come to an end to get rid of sexism, racism, colonialism, and naturism (or more specifically speciesism). In her article, ‘Taking Empirical Data Seriously: An Ecofeminist Philosophical Perspective’, Karen J. Warren shares the same view of the intertwined kinds of oppression with Plumwood when she maintains that ‘feminism is intrinsically a movement to end racism, classism, heterosexism, ageism, anti-Semitism, ethnocentrism’ (4). Thus, from the 1960s on, broadly speaking, feminists have realised that they were wrong in repudiating the relationship

between women and nature. They have started instead to re-align and entangle women and nature in an attempt to end both sexism and naturism—which will lead closer to an end to all other kinds of oppression. As explored in my Introduction, this has led to the emergence of ecofeminism or ecological feminism. According to Warren, ecological feminism is the position that ‘important connections exist between how one treats women, people of color, and the underclass on one hand and how one treats the nonhuman natural environment on the other’ (‘Taking Empirical Data Seriously’ 3). In her book *Neither Man Nor Beast: Feminism and the Defense of Animals*, Carol Adams maintains that ‘[f]eminist defenses of animals insist that we acknowledge and accept accountability for what we do to others’ bodies’ (13). She adds: ‘Animals’ bodies do matter’ (13). Indeed, feminists have ethical ‘accountability’ and responsibility towards animals. Plumwood insists that we must ‘see the non-human domain in the richer terms appropriate to ethics’ (*Environmental Culture* 9). Joan Dunayer also comments on the feminist change in attitude towards animals. She maintains that ‘women have confronted how closely they mirror patriarchal oppressors when they too participate in other species’ denigration’ (19). According to Dunayer, ‘women who avoid acknowledging that they are animals closely resemble men who prefer to ignore that women are humans’ (19).

In their attempt to end the objectification of women, animals, and all other oppressed groups, ecofeminists have adopted the concept of ‘intersectionality’. The metaphoric term ‘intersectionality,’ referring to intersecting and entangled forms of oppression, was first introduced by black feminist Kimberlé Crenshaw at the beginning of the 1990s. In her article ‘Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color’ (1991), Crenshaw states that she considers ‘how the experiences of women of color are frequently the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism’ (1243). According to Crenshaw, ‘[b]ecause of their intersectional identity as both women *and* of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one *or* the other, women of color are marginalized within both’ (1244, original italics). However the idea—rather than the term—of intersectionality is not new to feminist theory. It dates back to the 1970s when the Combahee River Collective issued their Feminist Statement. In ‘A Black Feminist Statement’ (1977), the Combahee River Collective explain that ‘[t]he most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression’ (271). The Collective clearly articulate that their work is ‘based upon the fact that the *major systems of oppression are interlocking*’ (271, my italics).

In her essay 'The Concept of Intersectionality in Feminist Theory', Anna Carastathis writes that '[i]n feminist theory, intersectionality has become the predominant way of conceptualizing the relation between systems of oppression which construct our multiple identities and our social locations in hierarchies of power and privilege' (304). According to Carastathis, 'oppression is not a singular process or a binary political relation, but is better understood as constituted by multiple, converging, or interwoven systems' (304). In her article 'Intersectionality as Buzzword', Kathy Davis also defines intersectionality as 'the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power' (68). According to Davis, 'while the idea of intersectionality may not have been new, it provided a new platform [...] for disparate theoretical approaches within feminist scholarship' (74). For her, the novelty and originality of intersectionality lies in the fact that although it

addressed an old problem within feminist scholarship, it did so with a new twist. It offered a novel link between critical feminist theory on the effects of sexism, class, and racism and a critical methodology inspired by postmodern feminist theory, bringing them together in ways that could not have been envisioned before. (73)

In the same vein, in 'Tied Oppressions: An Analysis of How Sexist Imagery Reinforces Speciesist Sentiment', Carol L. Glasser also maintains that '[a]ll oppression is rooted in the same system of domination and so embracing any form of oppression reinforces all oppressions' (51). According to Glasser, '[d]ichotomous epistemology and value-hierarchies are the main characteristics of patriarchy that enforce both sexism and speciesism' (51). She argues further that '[a]t its most basic level, intersectionality refers to the fact that any one form of oppression is experienced differently in light of other positions of oppression an individual holds' (53). She believes that the intersectional or entangled forms of oppression reinforce each other: 'In addition to the intersections of oppressions that individuals experience, it is necessary to recognize that different types of oppression mutually reinforce one another' (53). Similarly, Patricia Hill Collins contends that '[i]ntersectionality refers to particular forms of intersecting oppressions, for example, intersections of race and gender, or of sexuality and nation' (*Black Feminist Thought* 18). Yet, Collins differs from other feminists who are concerned with the idea of the intersectionality of oppressions in that she is not only concerned with intersectionality itself, but also with the way the entangled oppressions are organised. She coins the phrase, 'the matrix of domination'. According to Collins, 'the matrix of domination refers to how these intersecting oppressions are actually

organized' (*Black Feminist Thought* 18). Collins maintains that '[i]f power as domination is organized via intersecting oppressions, then resistance must show comparable complexity' (*Black Feminist Thought* 203).

Literary Explorations of Ecofeminist Intersectionality:

1- Deconstructing the (Wo)man/Animal Dualism in Toni Morrison's Works:

The idea of the intersectionality of oppressions is perhaps best exemplified in the writings of black American women feminists. As feminists who come from an identity position which suffers from almost all kinds of oppression—sexism, racism, colonialism, and speciesism—these writers are highly aware of the entangled web of oppression and they clearly depict and examine this in their writings. Toni Morrison can be described as an ecofeminist writer who tackles the idea of intersectionality and, in this, breaks down the woman/animal dualism in her works. This section will examine *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and *Beloved* (1987) to explore the ecofeminist collapsing of boundaries between black people and animals in Morrison's writings.

Morrison the woman and the ecofeminist cannot be separated from her racial and national background, all of which inform her literary explorations. Indeed, in her novels Morrison directly confronts how sexism, racism, colonialism, and speciesism intersect. Throughout her work, she implies that the liberation of women cannot be achieved without the liberation of all species from all forms of oppression. *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* can be regarded as a development in Morrison's thought from the particular to the general. In other words, Morrison focuses in *The Bluest Eye* on how sexism intersects with speciesism; then, in *Beloved*, she widens the scope of her focus to encompass the intersection of sexism and racism with speciesism.³⁰

Deconstructing the (Wo)man/Animal Dualism in *The Bluest Eye*:

The Bluest Eye (1970) is Morrison's first novel. It tells the story of a young black girl Pecola Breedlove who loathes herself because of her perceived ugliness and dreams of having blue eyes. Pecola believes that blue eyes are the ultimate mark of beauty and value.

³⁰ To my knowledge, to date there has been very little research on Morrison's critical engagement with speciesism.

Morrison uses metaphoric language, among other techniques, to brilliantly depict the intertwined relationship between women and animals, particularly, in an attempt to end the sexism and speciesism of patriarchal society. In her article ‘Transgression as Poesis in *The Bluest Eye*’, Shelley Wong states:

Morrison rhymes by distributing human and animal characteristics amongst her characters in such a way that the human and animal worlds are unmistakably linked through a shared materiality. When humans “nest” and dogs cough like old men, and when a “high-yellow dream child” has a “dog-tooth” and another girl “whinnies” in fear, the hierarchical boundaries between the human and the animal are no longer absolute and human pretensions to the contrary are exposed as self-delusions. (63).

Indeed, the use of animal metaphors to describe humans runs through the text from its beginning to its very end. Morrison not only employs animal metaphors to describe humans, she assigns human characteristics to animals as well. In this way, she blurs all boundaries between humans and animals. At the very beginning of the novel, African Americans who own houses are described as birds that have nests: ‘Propertied black people spent all their energies, all their love, on their *nests*. Like frenzied, desperate *birds*, they overdecorated everything’ (12, my italics). Cholly Breedlove, the main male character in the novel and Pecola’s father, is described throughout as an ‘old dog’. The narrator comments: ‘Cholly Breedlove, then, a renting black, having put his family outdoors, had catapulted himself *beyond the reaches of human consideration. He had joined the animals; was, indeed, an old dog, a snake, a ratty nigger*’ (12, my italics). In depicting Cholly as belonging to the animal species, Morrison certainly does not intend to belittle animals. On the other hand, she intends to rid Cholly of his humanity because he does not deserve to be a husband, a father, or even a human. Cholly is a drunkard who is irresponsible towards his family. He is of no use to his wife, his daughter, and his son. Mrs. Pauline Breedlove, Cholly’s wife, is the one who is responsible for the whole family, working day and night to feed them. She describes herself as ‘working like a mule’ (30). In addition, Miss Marie the prostitute says to Pecola: ‘You as bare-legged as a yard dog’ (39). Frieda and Claudia refer to Maureen Peal—the new school girl whom they envy—as a girl with a ‘dog tooth’ (48). Although animal metaphors are not unusual, their frequency within *The Bluest Eye*, combined with Morrison’s taking up of questions of intersectionality and exclusions from the human, render them a contributing part of her bigger exploration of human and non-human relations.

One of the most significant scenes in the novel, in which sexism, classism and speciesism intersect, is when the narrator tells the story of Geraldine and her son Junior.

Geraldine thinks of herself as a 'coloured' woman as opposed to a less respectable, and by implication lower class, black woman. She is first described as a bird who builds her nest: 'What they do not know is that this plain brown girl will build her nest stick by stick, make it her own inviolable world, and stand guard over its every plant, weed, and doily, even against him' (65). Further, Geraldine has a male cat whom she is depicted as loving more than her son Junior: 'The cat will always know that he is first in her affections. Even after she bears a child' (67). Junior feels jealous of the cat and mistreats him. As Junior grows up, 'he learned how to direct his hatred of his mother to the cat, and spent some happy moments watching it suffer' (67). Geraldine 'could effectively soothe the animal when Junior abused *him*' (67, my italics). Morrison uses the object pronoun 'him' to refer to the cat. She regards the cat as a being that deserves to be respected and treated as a member of the family. Rejected himself, Junior is the one who relates sexism to speciesism because he enjoys in parallel 'bullying girls' and abusing animals (68). He invites the lower class Pecola to his house in the absence of his mother in order to enjoy tormenting Pecola and the cat at the same time. Pecola feels sorry for and sympathises with the cat because she identifies herself with the black cat with the blue eyes. She even feels the pain of the cat when Junior hurts both of them:

He [the cat] wound himself in and about her legs. Momentarily distracted from her fear, she squatted down to touch him, her hands wet from the tears. The cat rubbed up against her knee. He was black all over, deep silky black, and his eyes, pointing down toward his nose, were bluish green. [...] Pecola rubbed the cat's head; he whined, his tongue flicking with pleasure. The blue eyes in the black face held her. (70)

In this situation, Morrison significantly describes a moment of identification between Pecola and the cat. Both of them are oppressed by Junior and they relieve each other's pain. Being black with blue eyes, the cat reflects Pecola's damaged inner self because this is the appearance that Pecola dreams of having.

Sexism, racism, and speciesism are also interlocked in the scene when the light-skinned self-proclaimed minister Elihue Micah Whitecomb—who changes his name to Soaphead Church—exploits Pecola's innocence to get rid of 'Bob', the 'old dog' owned by Church's religious neighbour Bertha Reese (136). The old dog Bob disturbs Soaphead Church. Therefore, 'Soaphead finally determined to put an end to the animal's misery, and bought some poison with which to do it' (136). He uses Pecola as 'a vehicle' to carry out the murder (139), promising to fulfil her wish to have blue eyes as a reward. Just as Morrison describes Cholly Breedlove as an 'old dog' at the beginning of the novel, she describes the old dog Bob as an 'old man' towards the end of the novel. After he eats the poisoned meat,

the dog ‘coughed, the cough of a phlegmy old man’ (139). In this way, Morrison subtly blurs the boundaries between humans and animals. The fact that Soaphead Church uses Pecola as a vehicle to poison the dog and kill him can be read as an example of how the oppression of women and the oppression of animals are intertwined.

Morrison more fully breaks down the boundaries between humans and animals in the violent scene when Cholly rapes his young daughter Pecola. Cholly identifies with wild animals in this scene. The narrator unusually gives us the interior view of Cholly’s attitude towards his daughter when he is raping her:

The tenderness welled up in him, and he sank to his knees, his eyes on the foot of his daughter. *Crawling on all fours* toward her. [...] He put his head down and nibbled at the back of her leg. His mouth trembled at the firm sweetness of *the flesh*. (128, my italics)

Cholly is implicitly described as a dog that crawls ‘on all fours’. His attitude is labelled in the novel as a ‘wild’ thing (128). It is significant that Cholly here is no longer a human who feels a sexual desire towards Pecola; he is more like a dog who is attracted to a piece of meat. This is clear when Cholly nibbles Pecola’s leg and tastes ‘the sweetness of the flesh’. In her *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, Carol Adams believes that when a woman is raped, battered, or victimised in any way, she feels ‘like a piece of meat’ (67). She implies that at this moment of exploitation, the victimised woman feels herself only an object, as corporeal flesh only. At the same time, the victimised woman is also objectified in the eyes of the victimiser because he does not regard her as a full human being. He considers her as flesh only, without a soul or reason or other attributes deemed human. Thus, the woman suffers from double objectification when she is raped.

Although Morrison focuses in this novel on sexism and how it is entangled with speciesism, one cannot separate the sexism from racism in her writing. Actually sexism can be regarded as a direct consequence of racism here as one amplifies the other. The frustration that Cholly Breedlove suffers from and which leads him to mistreat his family and rape his own daughter is at least partly a result of past humiliations in a white supremacist culture. He himself was raped by the gaze of two white men who watched him in a sexual encounter when he was young. Instead of hating the white men, Cholly hates his girlfriend who shared the traumatic incident with him: ‘For some reason Cholly had not hated the white men; he hated, despised, the girl’ (31). One of Morrison’s most powerful depictions is to unfold how because black Americans used to live in a hierarchical white slaveholding society which positioned them at the low end of the hierarchy as slaves, closer to animals than humans, they

create mimetically another hierarchy among themselves. For example, Geraldine is brown skinned and declares herself a coloured woman who believes that coloured people are better and should have more privileges than 'niggers'. She always tells her son Junior not to play with niggers: '[H]is mother did not like him to play with niggers. She had explained to him the difference between colored people and niggers. They were easily identifiable. Colored people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud' (67). When Geraldine sees Pecola in her home, she kicks her out and humiliates her: 'Get out, [...] you nasty little black bitch' (72). Morrison significantly describes the hierarchy of oppression that black people perpetuate among each other when the narrator says of black women:

Everybody in the world was in a position to give them orders. White women said, "Do this." White children said, "Give me that." White men said, "Come here." Black men said, "Lay down." The only people they need not take orders from were black children and each other (108).

The narrator adds: 'When white men beat their men, they cleaned up the blood and went home to receive abuse from the victim. They beat their children with one hand and stole for them with the other' (108). This explains the chain of oppression that causes black people to suffer. White people beat and torture black men; then black men go home to batter their wives; then the mothers mistreat their children because they are weaker than them; and the children sometimes—as is the case with Junior—mistreat animals as they stand at the bottom of the hierarchy. Thus, we are shown sexism and speciesism can never be separated from racism.

Deconstructing the (Wo)man/Animal Dualism in *Beloved*:

Beloved (1987) is Morrison's fifth novel, is regarded as her masterpiece and continues to develop her engagement with speciesism alongside racism and sexism. It tells the story of the ex-slave black woman Sethe who killed her daughter Beloved about eighteen years before the narrative begins in order to protect her from the humiliation of slavery. The ghost of Beloved returns in the form of a twenty-year old girl who upends the life of her mother and her sister Denver in an attempt to take revenge and to find a place and connection. In *Beloved*, Morrison widens the scope of oppression and domination as she goes back in time to the years from 1853 to 1873, spanning both slavery and the Reconstruction after the Civil War in America. Here Morrison is not only concerned with pinpointing the oppression that black women suffer, but also probing the oppression of all black people, including men. This is

apparent in the fate of the Sweet Home men—Halle, Paul D Garner, Paul A Garner, Paul F Garner, and Sixo. In addition, Morrison depicts the violent treatment of animals by white slave owners. Thus, *Beloved* is a novel that examines how sexism, racism, and speciesism intersect.

Black people are likened to animals throughout the novel. They are not only likened to animals linguistically and metaphorically, but they are literally mistreated as animals. It is significant that under slavery white people consider black people in most cases as ‘domestic’ animals. In her article ‘Sexist Words, Speciesist Roots’, Joan Dunayer points out that most nonhuman animal metaphors that disparage black people ‘refer to domesticated animals like the chicken, cow, dog—those bred for service to humans’ (12). According to Dunayer, domesticated animals ‘are bred for show, for sale, for servitude’ (16). Indeed, when they are regarded as domesticated animals, black people are treated accordingly. They are ‘objectified’ and treated as ‘property’ for the whites. Of course anyone has the right to do whatever s/he likes with his/her property. Thus, domesticating and objectifying black people legitimises the white people’s mistreatment of them. In this way, ‘[n]on human-animal terms [...] serve as racist epithets’ (Dunayer 16). This is a clear example of racial domination and oppression. According to Val Plumwood in her *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, the conceptual structure of domination ‘marks women, nature, “primitive” people, slaves, animals, manual labourers, “savages”, people of color—all supposedly “closer to animals”’ (27). Patricia Hill Collins also elaborates on the racial oppression of black people by likening them to animals in her book *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*. She maintains that:

Dehumanizing Black people by defining them as nonhuman and as animals was a critical feature of racial oppression. Enslaved Africans who were owned, traded, and sold as part of capitalist marketplace relations were clearly exploited. Once held as slaves, Black people gained no income from their labor. The *objectification* of people of African descent as chattel, the *commodification* of objectified Black bodies as property, and the *exploitation* of Black people as property and as workers are all closely linked. (55, my italics)

According to Collins, ‘objectification’, then ‘commodification’, then ‘exploitation’ are the three consecutive stages of white people’s appropriation of black slaves. As objects, black people are denied subjectivity and agency. Consequently, this justifies anything white people do with them. They can be sold, raped, commodified, and exploited. For this reason, Collins argues that racism in America cannot be separated from capitalism. She believes that

‘[c]ertainly animals could be slaughtered, sold, and domesticated as pets because within capitalist political economies, animals were commodities that were owned as primitive property’ (*Black Sexual Politics* 100). Collins believes that likening slaves to animals not only justifies all kinds of abuse towards them, but it also serves to show how civilised and superior white people are. Linking this to sexual aspects, she contends:

As the history of animal breeding suggests, the sexual promiscuity of horses, cattle, chickens, pigs, dogs, and other domesticated animals could be profitable for their owners. By being classified as proximate to wild animals and, by analogy, eventually being conceptualized as being animals (chattel), the alleged deviancy of people of African descent lay in their sexual promiscuity, a “wildness” that also was believed to characterize animal sexuality. Those most proximate to animals, those most lacking civilization, also were those humans who came closest to having the sexual lives of animals. (*Black Sexual Politics* 100)

In her book *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery*, Marjorie Spiegel shares the same viewpoint with Collins as she claims that ‘the domination of animals [...] was in many cases used as a prototype for the subjugation of blacks’ (30).

From the very beginning of *Beloved*, sexism, racism and speciesism are intertwined when Morrison implies that black men and women slaves are treated as animals. In this, Morrison echoes how former slaves addressed the same treatment and categorization in their autobiographical slave narratives of the nineteenth century. Black people are categorised as chattel. Morrison’s narrator says that none of the black characters ‘had lived a livable life’ (198), commenting that ‘[i]n all of Baby’s life, as well as Sethe’s own, men and women were moved around like checkers. Anybody Baby Suggs knew, let alone loved, who hadn’t run off or been hanged, got rented out, loaned out, bought up, brought back, stored up, mortgaged, won, stolen or seized’ (23). The narrator adds:

Even the educated colored: the long-school people, the doctors, the teachers, the paper-writers and businessmen had a hard row to hoe. [...] *Whitepeople believed that whatever the manners, under every dark skin was a jungle. Swift unnavigable waters, swinging screaming baboons, sleeping snakes, red gums ready for their sweet white blood.* (198, my italics)

Here Morrison significantly shows how all black people, regardless of their level of education or social status, were negatively related to the realm of nature in the dominant white culture. White people convinced themselves that their bad treatment of black people was a kind of justifiable self-defense and discipline because all black people were savage and dangerous even if they looked otherwise.

In addition, Morrison depicts women and animals as interchangeable in the meeting of the sexual needs of the slave men at Sweet Home. The narrator says that the slave men at Sweet Home ‘were young and so sick with the absence of women they had taken to calves’ (10). When the slave men do not find women to have sex with, they have sex with calves and cows instead: ‘All in their twenties, minus women, fucking cows, dreaming of rape, thrashing on pallets, rubbing their thighs and waiting for the new girl’ (11). Often critics have shied away from discussing this depiction but it speaks to Morrison’s wider approach to the alignment of slaves with animals, the interlocking of sexism in chains of oppression, and racialised perceptions of sex and black sexuality. Further, when Sethe and Halle get married at Sweet Home, they are treated as animals that have and need no privacy while having sex. The young couple try to find a space ‘in the tiny cornfield Mr. Garner kept because it was a crop animals could use as well as humans’ (26). Yet, all the other Sweet Home men imagine what they are doing when they see the corn shaking: ‘Even the crows knew and came to look’ (26). The narrator comments that ‘Halle wanted privacy for her and got public display’ (26). After twenty years, when Paul D meets Sethe again at 124—Sethe’s house—he has sex with her. Morrison’s narrative gives us access to Paul D’s interior reflection that ‘[t]he jump [...] from a calf to a girl wasn’t all that mighty’ (26).

Not only are women regarded as calves and cows, men are also regarded as dogs, mules, and many other animals. When Sixo, Paul D, Paul F, and Paul A are watching Halle and Sethe under Brother—their communal tree—they are as ‘erect as dogs’ (27). Paul D and the other slaves in Georgia were described as ‘dogs’ (110) and they were later called ‘Buffalo men’ by a Native American community during their escape attempt (112). The narrator comments that in Schoolteacher’s scheme, the slave men at Sweet Home ‘were trespassers among the human race. Watchdogs without teeth; steer bulls without horns; gelded workhorses whose neigh and whinny could not be translated into a language responsible humans spoke’ (125). The slave men are not only animals; they are also domesticated animals that have been adapted so that they cannot harm anyone. They look wild in shape, but they are actually more like pets in their servile, ‘emasculated’ behaviour. This is the image that white slave owners project and wish to see internalised in order to prop up their own power. They want to see the enslaved as strong and wild animals with regard to work and reproduction, but at the same time they want them as domesticated pets with regard to obedience and servitude.

Moreover, when Paul D talks about his attempt to escape from Sweet Home, he says that he ‘had hidden in caves and fought owls for food [...] stole from pigs’ (66). When he was

caught, he was ‘doing mule work’ (41). He was treated like an animal when they put an iron chain in his mouth. He was kept in ‘a box built into the ground. [...] The box had done what Sweet Home had not, what working like *an ass* and living like *a dog* had not’ (41, my italics). Paul D not only sees himself as an animal, he believes that even animals are treated better than him. He argues that Mister—the rooster at Sweet Home—was better than him. As his name implies, Mister was the master and Paul D was the slave. According to Paul D:

Mister, he looked so [...] free. Better than me. Stronger, tougher [...], he was still king and I was. . . . [...] Mister was allowed to be and stay what he was. But I wasn’t allowed to be and stay what I was. Even if you cooked him you’d be cooking a rooster named Mister. But wasn’t no way I’d ever be Paul D again, living or dead. Schoolteacher changed me. I was something else and that something was less than a chicken sitting in the sun on a tub. (72)

Paul D envies Mister the rooster for having such a name and retaining an unbroken identity. It is worth noting that Mister is not given such a name and treated well for his own sake; it is rather for his value on the farm. This is a capitalist and slave-owning society that identifies everything according to its use value. Because Mister’s value at that time is greater than Paul D’s, he is treated better. The narrator comments on this brutally materialist society: ‘Unlike a snake or a bear, a dead nigger could not be skinned for profit and was not worth his own dead weight in coin’ (148). Indeed, the snake and the bear are more valuable than runaway slaves because after they are caught and killed, people can gain profit from their expensive hides. Thus, being like animals, the fate of the Sweet Home men was devastating: Halle loses his mind, Paul F is sold as a commodity, Paul A goes missing, Sixo is burnt, and Paul D lives on like an animal. Paul D comments on their fate: ‘One crazy, one sold, one missing, one burnt and me licking iron with my hands crossed behind me. The last of the Sweet Home men’ (72).

When the white man Schoolteacher—Mrs. Garner’s brother-in-law who represents Western learning and racist science—arrives at Sweet Home, he regards the black slaves as ‘laboratory animals’ for experiment and observation. Sethe says: ‘We just thought it was his manner to ask us questions. He commenced to carry round a notebook and write down what we said’ (37). Collins comments on Western science’s treatment of those of African descent as animals. She maintains, ‘[t]hus, within Western science, African people and apes occupied a fluid border zone between humans and animals’ (*Black Feminist Thought* 99). Collins adds, ‘[w]ith all living creatures classified in this way, Western scientists perceived African people as being more natural and less civilized, primarily because African people were deemed to be closer to animals and nature’ (*Black Feminist Thought* 99). Schoolteacher asks his two

nephews to put Sethe's 'human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right. And don't forget to line them up' (193). He believes that Sethe is not a full human being; she is part animal and part human. Sethe is an animal with regard to sex, reproduction, and servitude. She is a human only perhaps when they allow her to cook their food and take care of them in their home. Sethe is very upset, and realises the full implications, when she hears Schoolteacher describe her as an animal. She prefers to kill her daughter Beloved than to see her be treated as an animal within slavery. The narrator focalises Sethe's justification of the murder of her daughter: 'And no one, nobody on this earth, would list her daughter's characteristics on the animal side of the paper' (251). The fact that Sethe is offended by being categorised as an animal leads Tadd Ruetenik in his article 'Animal Liberation or Human Redemption: Racism and Speciesism in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*' to read *Beloved* as a speciesist novel. Ruetenik claims that 'Morrison's novel is a poignant example of human melioration, and yet also illustrates how the issue of human wellbeing cannot be cleanly separated from the consideration of animal exploitation' (318). He also suggests that 'Morrison's masterpiece, in fact, can be read as a justification of animal exploitation as a condition for the liberation of human slaves' (318). According to Ruetenik,

Sethe is offended at being considered part animal, and this would put her at odds with much of contemporary environmental philosophy, which maintains that human beings cannot remove themselves from animal nature. Sethe appears to be a speciesist, believing that humans have a privileged moral status. [...] She is greatly offended by the assumption, implied by schoolteacher's lesson on the moral superiority of whites, that she is not among the privileged class. (320-321)

However, this is not the case as Ruetenik understands it. In my analysis, *Beloved* is not a speciesist novel. It is, on the other hand, a novel that attacks speciesism. It is true that Sethe is offended to be categorised as an animal, but she is offended because she knows well the estimation of the animal in the eyes of white men. Morrison's depiction here allows the exploration of both dominant categorisation and reactions to it. As Dunayer maintains, '[I] likening women to nonhuman animals undermines respect for women because nonhuman animals generally receive even less respect—far less' (16). In her book *The Dreaded Comparison*, Marjorie Spiegel asks: 'Why is it an insult for anyone to be compared to an animal?' (15). Spiegel believes that:

Comparing the suffering of animals to that of blacks (or any other oppressed group) is offensive only to a speciesist: one who has embraced the false notions of what animals are like. Those who are offended by comparison to a fellow sufferer have

unquestioningly accepted the biased worldview presented by the masters. To deny our similarities to animals is to deny and undermine our own power. It is to continue actively struggling to prove to our masters, past or present, that we are *similar to those who have abused us*, rather than to our fellow victims, those whom our masters have also victimized. (30, original italics)

Because Schoolteacher considers Sethe an animal, he asks his two nephews to milk her like a cow by force and whip her severely. This is the hardest experience that Sethe undergoes as a slave. She keeps remembering and talking about it throughout the novel, saying: ‘And they took my milk’ (17). She also says: they stole the baby’s milk ‘after they handled me like I was the cow, no, the goat, back behind the stable because it was too nasty to stay in with the horses. But I wasn’t too nasty to cook their food or take care of Mrs. Garner’ (200). According to Sethe, milk—representing her nurturance for her children—is the only thing that she owns, and they took it: ‘Milk was all I ever had’ (159). Thinking back to her own childhood, she says that the slave wet nurses used to nurse the white babies first and often nothing was left to feed the slave children: ‘The little white babies got it first and I got what was left. Or none’ (200). The fact that white people take black women’s milk for their babies and leave nothing for black women’s own babies to eat reinforces the concept of ‘the breeder woman’ as Collins calls it. According to Collins, ‘[t]he image of the breeder woman emerged to defend the reproductive policies of slavery that encouraged Black women to have many children’ (*Black Sexual Politics* 56). Black slaves were regarded as ‘breeders’, not ‘mothers’. This served to justify all kinds of practices for white slave owners. First, breeder status justifies regarding the slave woman as a machine for reproduction. She is asked to give birth to a lot of babies in order to increase the ‘property’ of the slave owner. Second, being a breeder justifies the violent act of the slave owner when he separates babies from their mothers, just as calves are taken away from their mothers after birth. Third, being a breeder justifies rape and forcing women slaves to have sex with a lot of different men for the sake of reproduction only. Fourth, the definition of breeder justifies taking milk by forcing slave women to feed white babies first instead of nurturing their own babies. Sethe’s mother, Sethe, and her mother-in-law Baby Suggs are perceived as breeders, akin to animals, by the dominant order in the novel. Sethe only saw her mother a few times before white people killed her. Sethe says about her mother:

I didn’t see her but a few times out in the fields and once when she was working indigo. By the time I woke up in the morning, she was in line. If the moon was bright they worked by its light. Sunday she slept like a stick. *She must of nursed me two or*

three weeks—that's the way the others did. Then she went back in rice and I sucked from another woman whose job it was. (61, my italics)

Similarly, Baby Suggs was raped by many white men. Her 'eight children had six fathers' (*Beloved* 23). Halle is her youngest son and the only one who she could keep for a while. He lived with her for twenty years until he bought her freedom by making himself a slave for the rest of his lifetime. Breeding women had greater value than men because they had the ability to increase the master's wealth. The narrator says that Sethe's 'price was greater than his [Paul D's]; property that reproduced itself without cost' (228). These perceptions of the slave 'breeder' show how women and animals were detrimentally placed in proximity to each other in the hierarchy of oppression as established by Aristotle and subsequent metaphysical philosophers. It is this clear oppression of black women and animals, and their alignment with each other, that impelled black American ecofeminists—represented here by Morrison and Walker—to adopt their posthumanist stance in order to expose the devaluation of both black women and animals and to begin the important political process of mutual revaluation.

A clear example of how sexism, racism and speciesism intersect in the novel occurs in the slaughterhouse scene. In the Cincinnati slaughterhouse, men, women and animals are objectified by capitalist, racist, and speciesist white orders and people. Due to their treatment as objects they are alienated from their own bodies. Animals are alienated from their bodies when they are handled violently and then killed, treated as if already dead bodies rather than living beings. Meanwhile black workers are alienated from their bodies when they are driven relentlessly and gain little recompense for their work. According to Adams, the slaughterhouse is commonly used 'as a trope for the treatment of the worker in a modern capitalist society' (*The Sexual Politics of Meat* 79). In the slaughterhouse, the boundaries between "sexual violence and meat eating are collapsed' (*The Sexual Politics of Meat* 27). This oppression of both workers and animals is elucidated in the novel when the black men of Ohio, including Paul D, make their living in the slaughterhouse where they unwillingly oppress their fellow sufferers, i.e. animals. In this system, workers 'must be alienated from their own bodies and animals' bodies as well' (*The Sexual Politics of Meat* 80).

Moreover, the slaughterhouse scene in the novel shows how women in particular are related to animals in an 'intercorporeal' relationship. In her article 'Topographies of Flesh: Women, Nonhuman Animals, and the Embodiment of Connection and Difference', Jennifer McWeeny points out that 'our own flesh is related to that of others through lines of intercorporeal relations that collectively form topographies of flesh' (269). She believes too that 'identities are intersectional' (270). The bodies of both women and animals are sold in

the slaughterhouse in *Beloved* for black women prostitute themselves at the back of the slaughterhouse on weekends. Sethe says that after she left prison, she was about to do the same but, fortunately, she found a job at a restaurant: 'I got close. I got close. To being a Saturday girl' at the slaughterhouse (204). When Paul D is working with Stamp Paid in the slaughterhouse, a white man comes asking them for a girl called Judy (231). It is implied Judy is a black prostitute working behind the slaughterhouse. Thus, black women's bodies and animals' bodies intersect in their treatment in this place. In her *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, Carol Adams assigns a whole chapter to this idea of blurring boundaries between sexual violence towards women and meat eating. The title of the chapter itself is apt: 'The Rape of Animals, the Butchering of Women' (64). She clarifies how women and animals exchange roles in a patriarchal capitalist society, and describes the process of exploiting both animals and people in the slaughterhouse when she says:

One of the basic things that must happen on the disassembly line of a slaughterhouse is that the animal must be treated as an inert object, not as a living, breathing, being. Similarly the worker on the assembly line becomes treated as an inert, unthinking object, whose creative, bodily, emotional needs are ignored. (80)

Adams uses rape figuratively to imply the violation and objectification involved in the slaughtering of animals, but Morrison uses the rape of animals literally as outlined above when the slave men used cows and calves sexually at Sweet Home. The slaughterhouse scene and its raising of the treatment of both animals and humans marks Morrison definitively as an ecofeminist and negates any accusations that she might be a speciesist as Ruetenik indicated above. Morrison, in this scene, not only considers the suffering of black men and women, she also considers the suffering of animals when she details that '[p]igs were crying in the chute' (154). Here Morrison humanises the pigs and conveys their terror when they are about to be slaughtered. It is true, as Adams laments, that most

feminist theorists take us to the intersection of the oppression of women and the oppression of animals and then do an immediate about-face, seizing the function of the absent referent only to forward women's issues, not animals', and so reflecting a patriarchal structure. [...] What is absent from much feminist theory that relies on metaphors of animals' oppression for illuminating women's experience is the reality behind the metaphor. (*The Sexual Politics of Meat* 90)

Yet, Morrison is not one of those feminists who employ animals as a means only to forward women's issues. I suggest that we can see Morrison as an engaged ecofeminist who is concerned with pinpointing and laying bare equally the sources of the oppression of women

and animals. She avoids likening women to animals in pejorative terms unless illustrating the judgments of men like Schoolteacher. This is evident in *Beloved* when Morrison adds another positive dimension to the relationship between women and animals. Here women and animals are not only fellows in suffering and oppression; there is also sometimes a complexly positive or potentially empowering link between them. As Dunayer argues, ‘some expressions that compare humans to other animals are complimentary (busy as a bee, eagle-eyed, brave as a lion)’ (17). When Paul D was making his escape to freedom, ‘[h]e saw a witless colored woman jailed and hanged for stealing *ducks* she believed were *her own babies*’ (66, my italics). When Denver and Beloved are dancing together, they are ‘merry as kittens’ (74). Also when Beloved starts to tell her story to Denver, they are quiet ‘like birds in panic’ (76). In addition, when Stamp Paid tells Paul D how Sethe managed to protect her children from Schoolteacher and his nephews, he likens her to a hawk, suggesting strength. He says that she ‘flew, snatching up her children like a hawk on the wing; how her face beaked, how her hands worked like claws, how she collected them every which way’ (157). Depicting Sethe as hawk-like represents her resistance after the humiliating years of slavery.

One last point to be made is that although sexism, racism, and speciesism intersect in *Beloved*, Morrison presents the intersection of sexism and speciesism as the most powerful. This manifests itself when Morrison significantly widens the scope of oppression to include representation of black men as oppressors as well as white men, and at the same time includes white women among the oppressed. Although Paul D loves Sethe, and although he himself is offended at being likened to and treated as an animal, he describes Sethe as an animal to condemn when he learns that she killed her daughter. He says to Sethe: ‘You got two feet, Sethe, not four’ (165). This scene marks the way Morrison gathers all women under the oppressive operation of patriarchy in the novel. There are only three white women featured in the novel: Mrs. Garner, Miss Bodwin, and Amy Denver. All three of them are depicted as compassionate, kind, and good in their relations with Sethe. Although Mrs. Garner is the mistress of Sweet Home and therefore the owner of all the slaves after her husband’s death, she does not treat them badly and never whips them or humiliates them. After Mr. Garner dies, Mrs. Garner invites her brother-in-law Schoolteacher to live with her and take care of her property. When Schoolteacher oppresses the slaves, Sethe goes to Mrs. Garner to seek help. Yet, unfortunately, Mrs. Garner is too sick to do anything by that point, even to speak, though Morrison suggests she sympathises with her through her compassionate eyes and tears. Similarly, Miss Bodwin, the abolitionist, is depicted as a help to black women;

Baby Suggs's house 124 is hers due to the Bodwins, Miss Bodwin with her brother assists in Sethe's legal cause and also later gives Denver employment.

It is the white girl Amy Denver who most explicitly exemplifies Morrison's portrayal of white and black women as companions in their suffering in an oppressive patriarchal society and potential allies. Amy is a runaway heading towards Boston who helps Sethe deliver her baby Denver when Sethe is escaping from Sweet Home while pregnant. Amy empathises with Sethe and massages her swollen legs to relieve her pain. Significantly, Morrison depicts Amy as also escaping from her home in order to get away from her father's abusive treatment. Amy says to Sethe: 'I had me some whippings, but I don't remember nothing like this. Mr. Buddy had a right evil hand too. Whip you for looking at him straight' (79). She adds:

You don't even know about that, do you? Now you never will. Bet you never even sleep with the sun in your face. I did it a couple of times. Most times I'm feeding stock before light and don't get to sleep till way after dark times. [...] Kentucky ain't no good place to be in. Boston's the place to be in. That's where my mother was before *she was give to Mr. Buddy*. Joe Nathan said *Mr. Buddy is my daddy* but I don't believe that, you? (80, my italics)

Amy's words are both revealing and touching. She is frequently whipped by Mr. Buddy, whom she does not believe to be her father although it is implied that he really is. She is also made to work from dawn to dusk and allowed to sleep for only a few hours. The fact that Amy's mother 'was given' to Mr. Buddy implies that her indentured mother—like all black women—was treated like an animal or an object, given to a man as property.

To sum up, Morrison asserts herself as an engaged ecofeminist in her depiction of the interlocking relationship of sexism, classism, racism, and speciesism in an attempt to eradicate all these kinds of oppression. Pecola's identification with the black cat with blue eyes in *The Bluest Eye* and their depiction as fellow sufferers exemplify Morrison's ecofeminist stance. While *The Bluest Eye* focuses on an all-black community where Morrison explores how black women and animals are oppressed by black men and also by the hierarchies of class and colourism among black people themselves, *Beloved* widens the scope of intersectional oppression to include the oppression of animals by black and white men, of black people by white people, of black women by white men, and also of white women by white men. It is this exploration of the wide range of oppression which marks Morrison as not only ecofeminist, but also ecowomanist. While she depicts some commonalities between white and black women, racial experience is always foregrounded in her writing.

2- Deconstructing the (Wo)man/Animal Dualism in Alice Walker's Writing:

Like Toni Morrison, Alice Walker interrogates and starts to break down the (wo)man/animal dualism in her writings. Although Morrison and Walker share similar political, social, and cultural experiences as they come from the same ethnic background, they differ somewhat in the ends for which they break down the boundaries between women and animals. Morrison's main aim in collapsing the (wo)man/animal dualism is political. Her animal ecofeminist enquiry is based on the belief that the oppression of animals runs parallel to the oppression of women, especially marginalised women of colour. Alice Walker undoubtedly shares with Morrison the same political aim of deconstructing this dualism; yet, she adds another concern, which is spirituality. Walker's spiritual aim is based on her 'holistic' and womanist view of the world as explained in Chapter One. According to Walker in her article 'The Universe Responds', animals produce 'the spiritual equivalent of oxygen' for human beings. Their existence is essential for the spiritual well-being of humans. Walker contends:

I think I am telling you that the animals of the planet are in desperate peril, and that they are fully aware of this. No less than human beings are doing in all parts of the world, they are seeking a sanctuary. *But I am also telling you that we are connected to them at least as intimately as we are connected to trees. Without plant life human beings could not breathe. Plants produce oxygen. Without free animal life I believe we will lose the spiritual equivalent of oxygen.* (191, my italics)

Deconstructing the (Wo)man/Animal Dualism in *The Temple of My Familiar*:

Walker's novel *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989) is the most exemplary of her works in terms of representing her ecofeminist stance with regard to the relationship between women and animals. The title of the novel itself is suggestive of Walker's thought. Walker uses the word 'familiar' in the title and throughout the novel to refer to animals that have a familiar relationship with all people of colour, and specifically with women. The word 'temple' is also another significant word in the title. Walker believes that God is incarnated in the entire natural world, particularly in animals. The more people have a sense of familiarity and togetherness with animals, the closer they are to God. That is why Walker relates the two words in her title: 'The Temple of My Familiar'. Commenting on her choice of the novel

title, Walker states in her article ‘Turquoise and Coral: The Writing of *The Temple of My Familiar*’ that ‘I saw that our essential “familiar” is our own natural, untamed, “wild” spirit and that its temple is the cosmos, that is freedom’ (114). Thus, Walker admits that, for her, animals—or familiars as she calls them—represent the free spirit in its untamed state and that the temple is the whole universe which embodies the existence of God. Walker’s ecofeminist stance regarding the women-animals relationship is also clear when she says in the same article that *The Temple of My Familiar* ‘was less about the relationships of human beings to each other than *about the relationship of humans (women, in particular) to animals, who, in the outer world, symbolize women’s inner spirit*’ (114, my italics).

In this novel, Walker develops parallel plots with different protagonists. Throughout, she links the different plots together, one by one, until they are all inextricably interwoven towards the end of the novel. Walker’s holistic womanist stance manifests itself in the novel as Walker depicts characters from many different nationalities and ethnicities. She is not biased towards a certain ethnicity in her representation because all people, for her, are equal and they should all unite in love and peace.

From the very outset, the novel skillfully breaks down the (wo)man/animal dualism. Walker depicts the relationship between people of colour, particularly women, and animals as based on togetherness, mutuality, and interchangeability. The first story encountered in the novel is that of Latin American Zedé and her daughter Carlotta. Zedé’s mother is also called Zedé. The choice of the same name for the mother and the daughter is meaningful for Walker because throughout the novel she portrays the reincarnation of one character in another. Zedé’s mother was a seamstress who used to make capes out of birds’ feathers. The animal ecofeminist critique first appears when we learn little Zedé believes that plucking the birds’ feathers is a violent act. She identifies with the peacock and feels his cry when his feathers are being plucked. Zedé does not consider the peacock to be an insentient lesser body. He is, for her, a being that has a soul and can feel pain. The narrator says:

It was then that Zedé began to understand the *peacock’s mournful cry*. It had puzzled her at first why a creature so beautiful [...] emitted a sound so like a *soul in torment*. Next she would visit the man who kept the parrots and peacocks, and the painful plucking of feathers would be repeated. (7, my italics)

Walker enhances the identification between women and animals when she refers to little Zedé’s hair and the birds’ feathers interchangeably. Zedé’s mother cuts her hair short at the same time as talking of ‘the poor quality of the modern feather’ (7). The narrator states:

By high school her hair was cut short, just below her ears, and she tossed it impatiently as her mother complained of the poor quality of the modern feather. No feather, these days, she explain, was permitted to mature. Each was plucked while still relatively green. (7)

Collapsing the boundaries between women and animals continues in the third-generation of women, in women like Carlotta. Carlotta is big Zedé's granddaughter and Zedé's only daughter. Zedé flees with Carlotta to San Francisco Bay in the US. Although at first glance one sees big Zedé's plucking of the birds' feathers to make capes for people as an act of violence towards birds, Walker forces the reader to reconsider this view as the story progresses. When people wear clothes made of feathers, they are unknowingly turned into birds and behave like birds in their aspiration for freedom. When Zedé, Carlotta's mother, continues the job of her mother and makes capes of feathers for people in San Francisco, people are 'indeed birds of a feather' in their capes (11). Here plucking the birds' feathers turns out to be an intentional act leading to people being identified with birds. The narrator also describes Zedé's head as 'a nest of [...] frizzy brown hair' (17) and her eyes are 'birdlike' (21).

Not only women are likened to birds, but the black musician Arveyda, Carlotta's husband, is also identified with birds from the very beginning. When Arveyda becomes a famous musician, he nicknames himself 'Bird' (21).³¹ Although Arveyda is married to Carlotta and they have two children, he finds himself in love with her mother Zedé. Here Arveyda is likened to a bird whose body is with Carlotta but whose soul is with Zedé:

Wrapped in his *feathered cape*, his *winged boots*, he sent his soul *flying* to Zedé while holding his body, his thought, his attentions on Carlotta, whom he did not cease to love. Only, now he began to think it was Zedé he loved in Carlotta. (21, my italics).

The second plot that appears in the novel is the story of middle-aged African American professor of American history, Suwelo. Suwelo inherits his uncle's house after his Uncle Rafe dies. When he goes to his uncle's house to sell it, he meets an old black couple, Lissie and Mr. Hal, who tell him a lot of stories about their past. The relationship of togetherness between animals and people is very clear in all of Lissie's stories. Lissie can be considered to be Walker's mouthpiece in the novel. She is depicted as 'a lot of women' (32). Indeed, she is reincarnated throughout the novel as a woman, an animal, a man, white, and black. Lissie's reincarnation in many forms that represent almost all categories of people and

³¹This could also be an allusion to the famous American jazz musician Charlie Parker (1920-1955) who is also nicknamed as Bird.

even animals consolidates Walker's holistic view of the world that all people and animals not only coexist, but are also interchangeable. When Mr. Hal tells Suwelo about his past life in Africa, he says: 'It was a beautiful sight. Sometimes *all of us* would be out there watching: *children, grown-ups, the hound dogs, the cats, even the goats*. Just sitting or standing around in silence watching the sunset' (34, my italics). Notice here the phrase 'all of us' which encompasses all people and animals when they are gathered to watch the sunset. It is a sense of togetherness which breaks down all boundaries between people and animals in this scene.

Lissie also tells Suwelo her story of being a slave. As Africans, little Lissie, her mother, and her brothers and sisters were taken as slaves and put in a ship to be sold to white men in the Americas. Lissie recalls: 'We were packed as if we were sardines, for this two-month-long journey. Truly, sardines should not be packed so, and if it were in my power they never would be again' (53). Lissie not only identifies herself with sardines, but she also condemns the fact that sardines are packed in cans. She wants all living creatures to live freely and mercifully. This emerges more clearly in her following stories.

Walker's ecofeminist stance regarding the women-animals connection manifests itself further in the story of Lissie with her 'cousins'. Lissie keeps telling Suwelo about her cousins and how they helped her and taught her many good things in life. Surprisingly, after some pages of reading, these cousins turn out to be animals. Lissie believes that animals are not separate from human beings. She tells Suwelo about her animal cousins:

They were always trying to dress me leaves, skins from dead animals, moss, tree bark. It was funny. But it was from their experiments that I learned to dress and to want to be dressed; I learned to fasten a couple of pieces of leopard or panther skin fore and aft, and this pleased them, though I could tell they thought of my costume as a sort of prosthetic device. (64)

Lissie believes that animals are her actual relatives and she deals with them accordingly. She regards them as kinder and more merciful to her than her human relatives. The narrator comments: 'But then, obviously in Miss Lissie's estimation, her cousins were people, even more *peoplelike* than the folks from her own branch of the family' (71, my italics). This comment on the 'peoplelike' animals reiterates Walker's posthumanist attitude. She reconsiders that mode of metaphysical humanism that was based on a reductionist definition of personhood. People, for Walker, are not always human beings; they might be animals as she implies and explores in this novel. Conversely, not all human beings are 'people'; they might be animals as Morrison implied above. This also echoes Timothy Morton's above-

stated view that there are beings that we can regard ‘as people even when they aren’t people’ (8).

Lissie not only coexists with animals, she even dresses like them by wearing dead animals’ skins. When she is with Suwelo in her old age, she wears ‘a camel-hair coat’ and ‘a woolen shawl’ (67). This identification between Lissie and animals is very similar to the identification between Zedé and birds at the very beginning of the novel. Zedé used to wear and enable other people to wear birds’ feathers while Lissie used to wear animals’ skins. When Suwelo listens to Lissie’s story about her animal cousins, he himself becomes aware of the animals around him. He changes his attitude towards them and begins to view them as his ‘relatives’. The narrator comments: ‘Her story about the animal cousins had moved him, and each day he found himself more conscious of his own nonhuman “relatives” in the world’ (67). Suwelo becomes so conscious of his animal ‘relatives’ that he starts to reconsider all his relations with animals and animal products. He now feels disgusted to wear animal leather, saying: ‘What a euphemism, “leather”. A real nonword. Nowhere in it was concealed the truth of what leather was. Something’s skin’ (67). He even feels disgusted to wear his sunglasses that are made of ‘tortoiseshell’, saying to himself that there should be ‘no more tortoises to kill’ (67). In Part Four of the novel, Suwelo becomes vegetarian because in his eyes ‘naked chickens looked like naked babies’ (173). This attitude confirms Walker’s view that animals exist for their own being, not for the benefit of human beings. Here Walker is an ecofeminist par excellence as she decentres human beings and breaks down all boundaries between them and animals. She challenges anthropocentrism which argues that man is the centre of the universe and that all other creatures are created for his own service.

Lissie’s relationship with animals continues when she tells Suwelo that in one of the different lives that she has lived, she had a ‘familiar’:

Anyway, my familiar—what you might these days, unfortunately, call a ‘pet’—was a small, incredibly beautiful creature that was part bird, for it was feathered, part fish, for it could swim and had a somewhat fish/bird shape, and part reptile, for it scooted about like geckoes do, and it was all over the place while I talked to you. (88)

It is in this scene that the significance of the title of the novel appears. Lissie tells Suwelo that in one of her lives, everyone used to have a familiar. Familiar is Walker’s preferred alternative for the word ‘pet’, an animal companion or fellow being. The word itself signifies Walker’s call for ‘familiarity’ between humans and animals. The word “pet” might imply a sense of animal inferiority, because pets are kept for the benefit of humans. They are domesticated for many reasons that most of the time have nothing to do with the benefit of

animals themselves. Not only the name is significant here; the ‘familiar’ that Lissie describes is also very significant. Lissie’s familiar is more like an imaginary creature than a real animal. It is part fish, part bird, and part reptile. This is also intended because in this way Lissie combines almost all kinds of creatures that live in the sky, on earth, and under water in only one creature. It is as if Walker wants to say that humans should have a sense of familiarity and togetherness with all creatures surrounding them whether they are in the sky, on earth, or under water.

Lissie goes on to tell Suwelo about the relationship between women and their familiars towards the end of the novel when she tells the story of her mother. Lissie’s mother also had a familiar: ‘Her familiar was an enormous and very much present lion; they went everywhere together. This lion also had a family of his own. There was a lot of visiting us, and in the lion’s little family of cubs I was always welcome’ (255). This lion was called Husa. Lissie’s mother says that:

This was long, long ago, before the animals had any reason to fear us and none whatever try to eat us, which—the thought of eating us—I’m sure would have made them sick. The human body has been recognized as toxic, by the animals, for a very long time. (255)

This story of the lion is, indeed, very important. It signifies Walker’s utopian vision of the coexistence and friendship between humans and animals. In this utopian past, people and animals live in the same neighbourhood and exchange visits. They eat the same food and drink the same water. Animals in this world are women’s ‘familiars, companions, friends, or whatever you want to call them’ (255). It is significant that the animal that Walker depicts to be Lissie’s mother’s familiar is the lion, which is known today to be one of the most ferocious and difficult to tame animals. It is as if Walker wants to say that all animals, without exception, can be friends to humans. Walker’s ecofeminist position and her positive view of all animals, and particularly lions, manifest themselves when she talks about the ‘barbarous dogs’ that men took as their companions, in imitation of women. Lissie states:

Eventually, in imitation of the women and their familiars, companions, friends, or whatever you want to call them, the men learned to tame the barbarous forest dog and to get the occasional one of those to more or less settle down and stay by their side. *I do not mean to suggest that the dogs were barbarous in the sense that we sometimes think of animals today as being ‘red in tooth and claw.’ No, they were barbarous because they simply lacked the sensibility of many of the other animals—of the lions, in particular; but also of the elephants and turtles, the vultures, the chimpanzees, the monkeys, orangutans, and giant apes. They were opportunistic little creatures, and*

basically lazy, sorely lacking in integrity and self-respect. Also, they lacked culture.
(255, my italics)

These words from Lissie are humorous but also important because they foreground several aspects of Walker's ecofeminist stance with regard to animals. First, this passage signals that women are closer to animals than men are. In the story men try to be as close to animals as women, but they do not reach the proximity of women to animals. Women take animals as their friends and companions and they identify with them, whereas men take animals as their pets. Second, with these words, Walker subverts the Western metaphysical thought which relates animals to the realm of nature when she relates them to the realm of culture. She describes animals, especially lions, as being sensible, honourable, respectable, and cultured. She assigns to animals the qualities of admirable people.

The familiarity and friendship between women and animals appear also when Lissie tells Suwelo about one of her lives when she was a boy. When Lissie was a boy, she had a girlfriend. This girlfriend 'had a little familiar, a serpent' called Ba (257). According to Lissie, Ba 'was a lovely companion for her, and she loved it dearly and was always in conversation with it. [...] We were, all three of us, chattering right along, and eating, and feeling very happy' (257). Significantly, Walker chooses the serpent to be a familiar to the girl in this story. Historically, culturally, and even religiously, evil and vengeful women are negatively related to serpents. Here Walker subverts this negative perspective by identifying this girl positively with her serpent Ba. Lissie, a boy in this story, killed Ba accidentally and all the people leave him because of this violent unexpected act, although it was unintentional. Walker expresses her view again through Lissie when she tells Suwelo:

Now woman [...] kept alive some feeling for the other animals, though she was reduced usually to the caring and feeding of one small house cat. [...] We never forgot it should be possible to communicate with anything that had big enough eyes! *So there we were, the dark women, muttering familiarly to every mouse or cow or goat about the place.* (143, my italics)

This quotation is significant for two reasons. First, Walker laments the fact that today women keep some pets at home just to entertain themselves. Walker wants the relationship between women and animals to be based on mutual respect, familiarity, and friendship. Second, Walker defends witches who have historically been condemned and othered in several cultures. She defends witches who converse familiarly with animals, something that can cause trouble among humans for them.

In addition, the togetherness between (wo)men and animals is also evident when Lissie offers Suwelo a glimpse of her life in Spain in the Middle Ages. In her letter to Suwelo, Lissie writes that ‘the animals and our children were our world’ (144). However, Lissie says that this relationship between women and animals in Spain did not appeal to the Inquisitors: ‘But the Inquisitors, set in place to control us, declared “consorting” with animals a crime, punishable by being burned at the stake!’ (144). In order to get rid of both troublesome women and animals, the Inquisitors accused women who had intimate relationships with animals of being witches. They also used derogatory images to describe the relationship between black people, especially women, and animals. According to Lissie:

The Inquisitors claimed we were fucked and suckled by bulls and goats and all manner of malformed animal creatures. For good measure, they gave their devil—the black thing that represented the people they most despised and wished to be perceived as separate from—sharp cloven hoofs and pointed horns, a tail. They made it seem not only natural but also righteous to kill, as brutally as possible, without any feeling but lustful self-justification, any animal or dark creature that one saw. (144)

The above-mentioned idea of ‘otherness’ is clear in this quotation. Here, Walker, like Morrison, argues that all kinds of oppression are intertwined. She points out that the Inquisitors in Spain—who represent all colonialists and racists—banished black people to the realm of animality. They put them with animals in one category at the bottom of the hierarchy of civilisation and culture in order to show how uncivilised black people are and how civilised and cultured—how human—the white people are. The more black people are depicted as animals with ‘hoofs’ ‘horns’, and tails, the more brutal they become. When black people are depicted as such, this justifies the white colonialists’ exploitation of them and also killing of them. This brings us to Val Plumwood’s concept of ‘hyper-separation’. In her *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Plumwood argues that colonialists, racists, misogynists, and speciesists ‘hyper-separate’ themselves from non-whites, slaves, women, and animals in order to express their mastery and distinction. Plumwood maintains, ‘[t]his hyper-separated conception of the human expresses the master perspective, and his desire to exclude women, slaves and animals and keep his distance from them. It is his cultural identity which *links those spheres by exclusion*’ (72, my italics).

Lissie, Walker’s mouthpiece in the novel, explains the Inquisitors’ violent attitude towards women as being caused by jealousy of women’s relationship with animals. The men are jealous because women prefer animals to them. Lissie states, ‘[t]here was something about the relationship she had with animals and with her children that deeply satisfied woman.

It was of this that man was jealous' (144). It is at this moment that Walker's defence of animals appears more prominently than at any other moment in the novel. Lissie tells Suwelo of animals:

The animals can remember; for, like sight, memory is renewed at every birth. But our language they will never speak; not from lack of intelligence, but from *the different construction of their speaking apparatus*. In the world of man, *someone must speak for them*. And that is why, in a nutshell, Suwelo, goddesses and witches exist. (144, my italics)

Walker, in this quotation, challenges the long-held Western notion that one of the most distinctive marks of humanness is speaking. Fundamentally, she calls for respect for differences. If animals are different from humans in 'their speaking apparatus', this does not mean they are inferior. This means that they need someone to 'speak for them'. Walker is, indeed, a passionate speaker for animals and about animals. She also implies at the end of the quotation that goddesses and witches exist mainly to speak for animals by establishing intimate relationships with them.

Suwelo himself enhances the togetherness of humans and animals when he talks about his life with his ex-wife Fanny. He puts forward that they lived peacefully in a house surrounded by many other creatures:

[W]e shared the land with deers, squirrels, rabbits, raccoons, and birds of all description. There were enormous hawks playing—actually looking for food, but hovering, and appearing to play—against the wind, and the most graceful vultures, with huge wingspans, and owls—which, Fanny always said, I resembled, and so perhaps the owl was my totem—and sometimes sea gulls. (195)

This coexistence of humans and animals is put more clearly when Ola—Fanny's father who lives in South America and works as a writer, fighting all types of oppression via his writings—tells Fanny about Sandino. Sandino is one of the bravest resistors who fights against white oppression of the natives in South America. Significantly, Sandino not only defends native people, but he also defends animals and speaks for them. He always says about animals: "[T]hey are our little brothers" [...] "our loyal compañeros. How can you even think of eating them?" (216). According to Ola, Sandino 'held to the vision of the future he wanted to have, a future that would include even the monkeys' (216). Indeed, as Walker implies, animals and people are companions in peace and in resisting oppression. The bright future for people cannot be achieved without guaranteeing a bright future for animals as well.

Throughout the novel, Walker stresses the fact that humans and animals must coexist in a world full of love and peace. The wholeness of the world cannot be achieved without liberating both humans and nonhuman animals from all kinds of oppression. Yet, in Part Five of the novel, she adds another dimension to the relationship between humans and animals; that is, the spiritual dimension. She specifically adds this spiritual dimension to the relationship between women and animals. This is apparent in the story of Celie and Shug—Fanny’s grandmothers and also the same characters as found in *The Color Purple*. Celie is Fanny’s actual grandmother and Shug is her most intimate friend. Fanny tells Robin, her Chicana therapist, that Shug was Celie’s ‘Special Friend’ (212). They lived together as ‘consorts’ and died within a year of each other (212). What is remarkable in the story of Celie and Shug is their relationship with animals. According to Fanny: ‘The bird, any bird, it turned out, was precious to my grandma Celie, just as turtles and elephants were precious to her friend Miss Shug’ (112). When Olivia, Fanny’s mother, tells her about Celie and Shug, she says that ‘Miss Shug loved animals as she loved people’ (221).³² Walker stresses the fact that the liberation of women cannot be achieved without the liberation of animals and that both women and animals are tied in oppression in the story of Celie. Celie was raped by her stepfather and beaten by her ex-husband. Burdened with this damaging experience of rape and oppression, Celie became, for some time, aggressive towards animals because they were the only creatures weaker than her in the hierarchy of oppression. Olivia says to Fanny:

One of the most disturbing things I noticed about black people in the south, when we returned home near the end of the war, was the mistreatment—casual, vicious, unfeeling—of animals. Your grandmother’s behavior was no exception. She had a dog—everyone had packs of hounds. [...] He worshipped her; *he was her absolute slave. He had the most wounded, pained, saddened, completely expressive eyes I ever saw.* (221, my italics)

This early attitude of Celie when she was aggressive towards her dog Creighton is a consequence of the oppressive experience that she had as a subordinate in white society and to her stepfather and her ex-husband. Celie’s violent attitude towards her dog does not last for long, however, because she has already shown compassion towards animals deep inside her heart, but this compassion has been temporarily obscured by her bitter sense of oppression. Shug liberates Creighton the dog and he ‘was no longer a slave; he was a dog. Not only that, Creighton knew the difference. The next time Mama Celie tried to beat him, he bit her’ (222).

³² We already saw a glimpse of this relationship between Shug and animals in *The Color Purple* in the description of her house.

The dog's liberation here parallels Celie's in *The Color Purple*, both being achieved with Shug's help, so furthering the parallels between sexism and speciesism. After this, Celie makes friends with animals: she 'began to feel for everything: ant, bat, the hoppy toad flattened on the road' (222).

The spiritual dimension of the relationship between women and animals appears most vividly in Part Five of *The Temple of My Familiar* when Shug rewrites the Gospel from her own point of view. Walker does not reject religion, but she rejects the ideology of religion which is sexist, racist, colonialist, and speciesist—as illustrated in Chapter One of the thesis. That is why in almost all her works she invokes and explores spirituality rather than religion. Shug rewrites the Gospel in order to eliminate all boundaries between humans and nonhumans. Some of the teachings of her Gospel are:

HELPED are those who love the entire cosmos rather than their own tiny country, city, or farm, for to them will be shown the unbroken web of life and the meaning of infinity. [...] HELPED are those who love all the colors of all the human beings, as they love all the colors of animals and plants. (203-204)

Thus, *The Temple of My Familiar* invites us to categorise Walker as an animal ecofeminist par excellence. It denotes Walker's political and spiritual aims for relating people, and especially women, to animals.

Deconstructing the (Wo)man/Animal Dualism in 'Am I Blue?':

Although Walker's interest in animals can be traced throughout almost all her work, 'Am I Blue?' (1986) is selected here as typifying her posthumanist position for two reasons. First, Walker herself admits that this work is written mainly for animals. Second, the protagonist here is an animal and this illustrates how Walker writes for and about animals. She does not use animals to put forward the problems of women or any other marginalised groups (as Carol Adams accuses some feminists of doing). In her essay 'The Universe Responds', Walker acknowledges that 'Am I Blue?' is 'about how humans treat horses and other animals; how hard it is for us to see them as the suffering, fully conscious, enslaved beings they are' (188). The title of the story itself is suggestive for thinking about relations of animals to black people. Blue here is the name of a male horse, but the title 'Am I Blue?' is originally a song written and composed by Grant Clarke and Harry Akst in 1929 (Walker admits her debt to them in her footnote) (3). The Blues is commonly known as music of black American origin that developed in the US South in the late nineteenth and early twentieth

century. Thus, Blue as the name of the horse can be regarded as a kind of symbolism. Walker relates animals, especially horses, to black people from the very beginning of her story.

Although this story is only six pages long, Walker intensively presents in it the core of her posthumanist vision. The first time Blue the horse appears in the story, Walker describes him as ‘our closest neighbor’ (3). Indeed, Walker considers animals to be neighbours, companions, intimate friends, and relatives to humans. She does not see them as dumb beings. This is evident when she describes Blue in human terms. Through his eyes, she feels all the emotions that he feels deep inside his heart. Humans have a speaking apparatus in their vocal cords; but, for Walker, animals have a speaking apparatus in their eyes. This is why she believes she understands what animals want to say by looking into their eyes. By looking into Blue’s eyes, Walker understands that he ‘was lonely. Blue was horribly lonely and bored’ (5).

It is significant that Walker chooses the horse as the animal to be compared to black women in ‘Am I Blue?’. Perhaps this is related to the racist stereotypes that connected black women to horses with regard to their capacity for reproduction. In Morrison’s *Beloved*, although the white girl Amy Denver helps Sethe and sympathises with her, she does not forget that she is white and at one point asks Sethe: ‘What you gonna do, *just* lay there and foal?’ (33, my italics). This question typically summarises the dominant white view during slavery of black women with regard to reproduction. White people believed that black women were so strong and healthy that they simply did not feel pain when delivering their babies. As Amy implies, they just lay down and foal like horses. In her essay ‘Letter to People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals’, Walker submits a statement on horses and the ‘Premarin issue’. She explains in a footnote that:

The name Premarin is derived from “pregnant mares’ urine”. Horses are artificially impregnated, their urine is collected, and estrogen is extracted from it. The mares are forced to be pregnant most of their lives. Their offspring are taken away at birth. (162)

According to Walker, as an estrogen-replacement drug, Premarin ‘is an outrage against nature and beauty’ (162). This piece of medical information helps to explain why black women are likened specifically to horses in their fertility. The association also goes back to slavery and claims that separating black mothers from their children was not like separating white mothers from their children would be. Slave owners try to propagate the idea that black women are as fertile as mares and, consequently, can be impregnated almost all their lives as horse breeders do with mares. This happens in *Beloved* when Baby Suggs is forced to have sex with different men in order to be regularly pregnant. She has eight children from six different black and white men. Another cultural reason for likening black women to mares is

in order to claim that black women are so strong that they do not feel pain during pregnancy and in childbirth. Morrison depicts this sexist, racist, and speciesist idea of relating black women to mares in *The Bluest Eye* in the scene when Mrs. Pauline Breedlove remembers giving birth to Pecola. When Pauline Breedlove was delivering her daughter Pecola, the white doctor said: '[T]hese here women you don't have any trouble with. They deliver right away and with no pain. Just like horses' (97). The white doctor's view encapsulates Morrison and Walker's confrontation with categorisations that are sexist, racist, and speciesist at the same time. Yet a moment of identification between Pauline and the mare takes place when Pauline links her pain with that of the mare when she is giving birth to her foal. Pauline says to herself:

I hurt just like them white women. Just 'cause I wasn't hooping and hollering before didn't mean I wasn't feeling pain. [...] Besides, that doctor don't know what he talking about. He must never seed no mare foal. Who say they don't have no pain? Just 'cause she don't cry? 'Cause she can't say it, they think it ain't there? If they looks in her eyes and see them eyeballs lolling back, see the sorrowful look, they'd know. (97, original italics)

It seems Morrison, like Walker, believes that animals speak and express their emotions through their eyes. Pauline Breedlove argues that anyone who looks at the mare's eyes will feel her sorrow and her pain while she is foaling, thus not only affirming her own self in the face of objectification but also the being of the horse.

Patricia Hill Collins comments on this likening of black women to animals in their capacity for reproduction. She argues that this image was created by white slave owners in order to justify their interference in slave women's reproductive lives. By propagating the idea that black women deliver babies as easily as animals do, white slave owners justified forcing black women to give birth to a lot of children in order to increase their 'property'. According to Collins, [s]lave owners wanted enslaved Africans to "breed" because every slave child born represented a valuable unit of property, another unit of labor, and, if, female, the prospects for more slaves (*Black Feminist Thought* 78). In order to challenge this racist idea of likening black women to horses, Walker defends and celebrates horses in many of her works. She even has a collection of poetry entitled *Horses Make a Landscape Look More Beautiful* (1979). Although the content of this collection has nothing directly to do with horses, Walker intentionally chooses the title to pay homage to them. The significance of the title appears in the foreword to the collection when Walker quotes the words of Lame Deer, a holy man from the Sioux people, addressing the white colonisers: '*We had no word for the*

strange animal we got from the white man—the horse. So we called it sunka wakan, “holy dog.” For bringing us the horse we could almost forgive you for bringing us whiskey. Horses make a landscape look more beautiful’ (xiii, original italics).

The forced breeding of slaves to increase the property of their owners also happens to Blue in Walker’s short story. His owner brings a mare for him to mate with. Walker writes that when he was with his mate, however, Blue had ‘a different look in his eyes. A look of independence, of self-possession, of inalienable *horseness* [...]. The look in Blue’s eyes was one of unabashed “this is *itness*.”’ (6-7, original italics). Walker stresses the words ‘horseness’ and ‘itness’ to confirm that horses and all animals are real, full beings; they have consciousnesses and lived experiences that must be respected. After Blue’s mate became pregnant, her owner took her back and this cruel act turned Blue into ‘a crazed person’ (7). Walker editorialises:

I almost laughed (I felt too sad to cry) to think there are people who do not know that animals suffer. People like me who have forgotten, and daily forget, all that animals try to tell us. “Everything you do to us will happen to you; we are your teachers, as you are ours. We are one lesson” is essentially it, I think. (7)

In this quotation, Walker argues that humans’ mistreatment of animals will be revisited upon them. Walker writes that when Blue’s heart is broken after his mate is taken away, he has ‘a look so piercing, so full of grief, a look so *human*’ (8, original italics). Ironically, Walker contends that when he is broken-hearted, Blue loses his kind-hearted ‘horseness’ and turns into a cruel ‘human’. Walker justifies Blue’s subsequent hatred and violent treatment of humans by saying that ‘he had to put up a barrier within to protect himself from further violence’ (8). This is the same idea expressed above when Toni Morrison presents some black people in *The Bluest Eye*, such as Cholly Breedlove, as becoming careless and cruel as a consequence of white people’s bad treatment of them.

In addition, Walker expresses her ecofeminist position towards animals clearly in ‘Am I Blue?’ when she comments:

No, I was shocked that I had forgotten that human animals and nonhuman animals can communicate quite well; if we are brought up around animals as children we take this for granted. By the time we are adults we no longer remember. However, the animals have not changed. They are in fact *completed* creations [...] who are not likely to change; it is their nature to express themselves. What else are they going to express? And they do. And, generally speaking, they are ignored. (5, original italics)

Indeed, the significance of this quotation manifests itself in the following paragraph in the story when Walker subtly relates the alienation arising between animals and children when they grow up to the alienation between black women and white children when they grow up also. Implicitly, Walker positively equates black women with animals. She argues that white people neither pay attention to the feelings of black women nor the feelings of animals when they separate them from the children that they used to care for as the children mature:

Well, about slavery: about white children, who were raised by black people, who knew their first all-accepting love from black women, and then, when they were twelve or so, were told they must “forget” the deep levels of communication between themselves and “mammy” that they knew. Later they would be able to relate quite calmly, “My old mammy was sold to another family.” “My old mammy was _____. ” Fill in the blank. Many more years later a white woman would say: “I can’t understand these Negroes, these blacks. What do they want? They’re so different from us.” (5)

This brings us back to the idea of ‘the breeding woman’ outlined above. Like Morrison, Walker deplores the fact that, under slavery, black women were regarded as mere breeders and were also taken as mammies and carers for white children. After providing intimate care and affection their services were disposed of as the children grew up. As adults the same white people held racist negative stereotypes about black people and asserted differences rather than kinship. This idea is indirectly explored in Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* through the story of Pauline Breedlove. Pauline is very tough on her children Pecola and Sammy because she is physically and emotionally alienated from them most of the time. Meanwhile, she devotedly works as a housekeeper and carer for a little white girl, echoing the role of slave women with white children. She gives the white girl all her love, affection, and care. It is Pecola on whom she takes out her frustration and anger, as shown following an accident in her workplace:

Mrs. Breedlove yanked her up by the arm, slapped her again, and in a voice thin with anger, abused Pecola directly and Frieda and me by implication. “Crazy fool ... my floor, mess. . .look what you. . .work. . . get on out. . . now that. . . crazy. . . my floor, my floor. . . my floor”. (84-85)

Although she is furious with her own daughter Pecola, there is a stark contrast when Pauline Breedlove turns to the little white girl, calms her down, and speaks to her in a loving way: ‘Hush, baby, hush. Come here. Oh, Lord, look at your dress. Don’t cry no more. Polly will change it.’ (85). Ironically, Pecola and Sammy call their mother ‘Mrs. Breedlove’ and the white girl calls her ‘Polly’. Claudia comments when she hears the white girl call Mrs.

Breedlove 'Polly': 'The familiar violence rose in me. Her calling Mrs. Breedlove Polly, when even Pecola called her mother Mrs. Breedlove seemed reason enough to scratch her' (84). As a black woman, Pauline Breedlove suffers from different kinds of alienation. She is alienated from her own self when she cannot practise genuine motherhood with her own children; she is alienated from her own children when she gives all her love and affection to white children at her employer's; she will also be alienated from the white children themselves when they grow up, forget her affection, and see her only as a Negro.

In 'Am I Blue?', Walker not only maintains that black people are likened to animals in and after slavery, she also argues that American Indians are 'considered to be "like animals" by the "settlers" (a very benign euphemism for what they actually were), who did not understand their description as a compliment' (5-6). Walker goes on to widen the scope of her examples further to encompass all non-English-speaking women. She argues that these women serve as mirrors that reflect the civilised superiority of their partners when compared to them. This opinion echoes the idea outlined above by Woolf, Derrida, Haraway, and Braidotti when they pose that women, animals, and all marginalised entities serve as an Other and as a mirror to reflect the supremacy of the male, middle-class, and white Western mainstream model of culture. Walker points out in the story:

And about the thousands of American men who marry Japanese, Korean, Filipina, and other non-English-speaking women and of how happy they report they are, "*blissfully*," until their brides learn to speak English, at which point the marriages tend to fall apart. What then did the men see, when they looked into the eyes of the women they married, before they could speak English? Apparently only their own reflections. (6, original italics)

At the end of the story, Walker relates women and black people to animals directly and defends them together when she states that:

There are those who never once have even considered animals' rights: those who have been taught that animals actually want to be used and abused by us. [...] They are the great-grandchildren of those who honestly thought, because someone taught them this: "Women can't think," and "niggers can't faint". (8)

Thus, 'Am I Blue?' perfectly exemplifies Walker's ecofeminist stance regarding the relationship between women and animals. It gives further evidence that she speaks about and for animals through her depiction of the character of the male horse Blue as the protagonist of the story. She deconstructs the metaphysical humanist idea that humans are at the centre of the universe when she centralises all the thoughts, emotions, and reactions in the character of

Blue and externalises them through him. Even her choice of the name ‘Blue’—which is a clear reference to black musical traditions in the US—further consolidates her linking of black people to animals in an attempt to put an end to the systems and discourses that have enabled their mutual oppression by white people.

Conclusion:

From the analysis of Morrison’s and Walker’s writings in this chapter, it seems that, as ecofeminists, they share common grounds in their conceptualisation of the women-animals connection. They both deconstruct the (wo)man/animal dualism by redefining the meaning of being human and reconnecting women and animals in more positive terms. Yet, on closer investigation, Morrison and Walker can be seen to slightly differ in their aims in some respects. It is true that both of them share a political motivation for this women-animals alignment and they both use this co-existence and connection as a kind of resistance, working to end all kinds of oppression towards women, animals, black people, and all marginalised groups. Yet, Walker widens the scope of her project and incorporates another spiritual purpose. She advocates a holistic view of the world, aiming to make all people and animals—regardless of their differences—coexist in love and peace. This adds a utopian dimension to the critique in her work, one which may make her vision be viewed as more unrealistic, if not impossible, to achieve in life.

As can be extrapolated in terms of Derrida’s two-stage process of deconstruction, Morrison and Walker do not simply invert the (wo)man/animal dualism. Evidently, however, they both engage theoretically and critically in re-defining the meanings of ‘human’ and ‘animal’ even before Derrida’s deconstructionist call to re-define them in his works ‘The Animal That Therefore I Am’ (1997) and *The Beast and the Sovereign*, a collection of lectures given between 2001 and 2003. All of Morrison’s and Walker’s above-examined fiction predates the theory of posthumanism as presented by Derrida and his later disciples. This supports the claim that Morrison’s and Walker’s fiction not only reflects the preoccupations and arguments of theoretical writing, but also engages dynamically with these theoretical debates, poses new worlds to further our thinking and, sometimes, even reaches new theoretical conceptualisations. Morrison’s thinking on the objectification of black women and animals under patriarchy, capitalism, and colonialism, and the exchange of women’s and animals’ bodies in these oppressive systems—as illustrated in *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*—anticipate sociologist and African-American studies scholar Patricia Hill

Collins' theorisation of the same issues in her *Black Feminist Thought* (1990) and *Black Sexual Politics* (2004). Similarly, Walker's extensively developed theory of ecofeminist spirituality, or ecowomanism, in *The Temple of My Familiar*—as represented in Celie and Shug's rewriting of the gospel according to their own spiritual beliefs—anticipates the spiritual ecofeminism of Starhawk and Rosemary Radford Ruether theorised in their works of the 1990s. Walker's depiction of animals as people-like moreover potentially deconstructs Hegel's metaphysical idea of personhood and also anticipates Timothy Morton's posthumanist definition of persons as not only people but including all beings with whom we have relationships, as articulated in his *Ecology Without Nature* (2007) and *The Ecological Thought* (2010).

CONCLUSION

The primary aim of this thesis has been, firstly, to focus on a main but barely centrally explored concern of ecofeminism—which is the deconstruction of dualisms. Secondly, the thesis has not only investigated the origin of these dualisms and the ecofeminist theoretical deconstruction of them, but selected fiction by Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Marilynne Robinson has been discussed in order to explore how these writers not only reflect ecofeminist theory in their fiction, but also engage dynamically in the on-going theoretical debate by offering their own investigation of its limits, preoccupations and tenets. Ecofeminists are aware that women, nature, and all marginalised groups are caught in a web of oppressions that can be seen to arise from Western dualistic thinking. This thesis has regarded the culture/nature dualism as an underpinning dualism that has given rise to various interlocking sets of dualisms whose effect is to subordinate nature, women, animals, and all marginalised groups. Three particular sets of dualisms have been explored in depth: the transcendence/immanence, the public/private, and the (wo)man/animal.

Chapter One discussed the deconstruction of the transcendence/immanence dualism and traced the philosophical and theological origin of this dualism. It also explored the feminist reaction to this dualism as informed by Derrida's two-step process of deconstruction: first inverting the dualism, and second, re-defining the terms of the dualism. Some readers might find the abstract meaning of transcendence and immanence difficult to comprehend. Yet, when played out in the fiction of Morrison, Walker, and Robinson, it transpires that transcendence/immanence is handled differently in the work of each of these writers. It refers to ideas of God/world or religion/life in the works of Marilynne Robinson, for example. As one whose mind is nourished by religious experience—especially the theological thinking of John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards, Robinson attempts to deconstruct the God/world dualism, mainly in *Gilead*, to illustrate that God manifests Himself on earth in his Creation and that God is not aloof or up above in the heavens. Influenced by their positioning as black in white dominated US society, Morrison's and Walker's conception of the transcendence/immanence dualism is different from that of Robinson. While Robinson does not refer in her works to any gendered or racialised reading of the transcendence/immanence dualism, Morrison and Walker insist that this dualism has historically been gendered and racialised to oppress women and marginalised groups. This has been explored in Morrison's *Paradise* and Walker's *Meridian*, *The Color Purple*, and *The Temple of My Familiar*. For them, patriarchy

and imperialism historically have instilled in the minds of black people the perception that God is male, white, and a Westerner. In reaction, Morrison and Walker adopt a more liberating spiritual approach as a means to escape from this reductive scheme of institutionalised religion. It is worth noting that the terminology that Morrison, Walker, and Robinson use to refer to their re-defined religious understanding is also different. In her critical writings, Morrison prefers to use the word ‘faith’ to describe her more liberating version of religion. In an interview with Carolyn C. Denard, Morrison comments on how religion functions in *Paradise*: ‘There are lots of conflicts in the book, and religion is one. Not religious believers versus non-believers so much as what turns out to be conflict between politics and *faith*’ (191, my italics). As explained extensively throughout the thesis, Walker prefers the word ‘spirituality’ as more liberating and accommodating than religion. This sense of spirituality represents, as Karla Simcikova rightly argues, ‘a further and more mature phase of Walker’s thinking (10). As for Robinson, whose re-definition of religious experience is more grounded in Christian theology, especially Protestant theology, she first uses the term ‘religionless Christianity’ to refer to non-ideological religious experience, in her ‘That Highest Candle’ in 2007. Yet, in her latest book *What Are We Doing Here* (2018), she uses the word ‘theology’ as more liberating than religion, defining it as: ‘the attempt to realize in some degree the vastness and the atmospheres of this matrix of Being. Theology is the great architecture of thought and wonder that makes religious experience a house of many mansions, open to the soul’s explorations, indeed, made to invite and to accommodate them’ (40).

Likewise, Chapter Two extensively discussed the deconstruction of the public/private dualism from an ecofeminist perspective. First it investigated the dualisation of the public and the private spheres in Western thought and, then explored the feminist and ecofeminist reaction to this dualism. Ecofeminist theorists argue that the concepts of public and private have been gendered and also racialised in Western thought. Selected fiction by Alice Walker and Marilynne Robinson has been examined to give the reader a more dynamic example of how the public/private dualism is deconstructed through the imaginative spaces of literary fiction. The exploration of Walker’s *Meridian* and *The Color Purple* and Robinson’s *Housekeeping* and *Lila* further indicates that as a black American writer, Walker’s understanding of the public and the private spheres differs from Robinson’s. Robinson’s understanding is based on both her feminist and religious experience as she contests the patriarchal tradition of women’s domesticity. As an extension of her purpose in deconstructing the transcendence/immanence dualism, she also challenges the religious view

that God's presence can be felt only indoors, whether in homes or in churches; rather she proposes that the wilderness is a space where one can feel God's presence. Robinson's feminist enterprise is more evident in her first novel *Housekeeping*. Here she presents different conceptualisations of women's reactions to domesticity and wilderness. The grandmother and Lucille feel more comfortable staying at home in accordance with their gender role as defined by patriarchy, whilst Sylvie and Ruth feel more at home in the wilderness as a kind of extension to the domestic sphere, thus blurring the boundary between the domestic and nature. Robinson also depicts the in-between status of Helen. She is neither content with her patriarchally-defined domestic space nor able to actively re-define her role and, thus, she commits suicide early in her life. In *Lila*, representing a more mature phase of Robinson's religious belief and thought, she depicts Lila and Doll, who live all their lives in the wilderness, without participating in organised religion, as presenting a more liberating religious experience than that of Reverend John Ames who has dedicated his life to the Church. It is Lila and Doll's living out in nature which is shown to give them a rich religious awareness because, in Robinson's view (shared with Walker), God manifests Himself among His creation.³³ As for Walker, her fiction challenges the patriarchal and racially constituted idea that black women cannot simultaneously access both the public sphere and the private sphere. Through her depiction of the character of Celie in *The Color Purple* she shapes a more concrete example of how a black, downtrodden housewife can change her existence and access the public sphere both by gaining agency and by having a professional career. Here Walker defines the public sphere as the sphere of agency and gaining voice, whether inside or outside the house. Significantly, even when Celie succeeds as a businesswoman she does so from inside the home by repurposing a dining room in Shug's house and turning it into a small factory for tailoring clothes. Thus Walker blurs the boundary between the public and the private, and re-defines both spheres. In *Meridian*, informed by the historical period of the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement, Walker is more concerned with the issue of how to be political, by means of taking part in political struggles, and at the same time retain the spiritual part within oneself in order to protect against and reject violence and aggression.

Similarly, Chapter Three discussed the deconstruction of the (wo)man/animal dualism and how it is crystallised and examined in a more tangible and experiential way in the works of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker. Significantly for my argument concerning the

³³ Robinson consolidates this idea of being 'religionlessly' religious in *The Givenness of Things* when she expresses her admiration for the 'piety' of Shakespeare's 'pagan' characters who experience religion and come close to God through their meditation on the natural world: 'I take these pious pagans to be living out a meditation on the meeting in the Garden' (225).

differences between mainstream feminists and black American feminists—as represented here by Morrison, Walker, and Robinson—Robinson never tackles the relationship between women and animals either in her fiction or her non-fiction. She is more concerned with religious questions and views that do not recognise this issue. Within Robinson’s larger literary project in her novels, we can say that her main focus is not exploring the dynamics of oppressions, although she astutely challenges dualistic thinking which gives rise to oppression. The human-centredness of her work is part of her religious enquiry because, as she maintains, human beings ‘alone among the animals can sin—one of our truly notable distinctions. Or, to put it another way—we are the only creatures who are [...] morally competent. Responsible, or at least answerable’ (*The Givenness of Things* 236). On the other hand, the fictional works of Morrison and Walker abound in explorations of the relationship between black American people in general and women in particular and animals. As was made clear in the third chapter, black women have been pejoratively described as, or aligned with, animals in Western philosophy. Ecofeminists Morrison and Walker seek to reshape the relationship between women and animals and show how animals are women’s fellows in oppression. They suggest in their writings that no liberation of women can be achieved without a serious attempt also to liberate animals. In Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, through the empathy between the little girl Pecola and the black cat during a scene of humiliation and cruelty, and between Pecola’s mother Pauline and a mare while giving birth, Morrison stresses that the oppression of black women and animals is inseparably entangled in patriarchal, racist and speciesist society. Meanwhile Walker manifests the possibilities of a more spiritual relationship between black women and animals, especially in *The Temple of My Familiar*.

As has become evident from the theoretical analysis of ecofeminism throughout the thesis, ecofeminism is not merely an offshoot of feminism flourishing in its third-wave. Significantly, ecofeminism is a theory and practice that develops and builds historically through all waves of feminism. As charted, first-and-second-wave feminists helped in developing ecofeminism because their attempts, whether to negate the woman-nature relationship or to invert the different sets of dualisms, proved to be strategic, in Derrida’s and Spivak’s sense, and led to the ecofeminist phase of re-defining the terms of the dualism. This prompts me to confirm the relevance of the employment of the wave metaphor as a radio wave rather than an oceanic wave—as coined by Irish feminist activist Frances Power Cobbe in her Introduction to *The Woman Question in Europe: A Series of Original Essays* (1884)—

to ecofeminism's relation to the previous stances and preoccupations within feminism.³⁴ According to Cobbe, feminism is tide-like in its progression and the uniformity of its aims. Recently, however, some feminist critics have begun to question the adequacy of this wave metaphor for describing shifting attitudes and positionings in feminist movements. They not only question the 'wave metaphor', but also the labels "first", "second" and "third" wave used to categorise feminist generations. Nancy A. Hewitt, for example, questions the adequacy of the wave metaphor for feminism and regards it as imprecise for envisioning feminism because it falsely implies that each wave revolts against and challenges its preceding wave. In her edited book *No Permanent Waves*, she poses that '[t]he concept of waves surging and receding cannot fully capture these multiple and overlapping movements, chronologies, issues, and sites' (1). But the case with feminism, in Hewitt's view, is that '[t]he propagation of new waves was not simply a means to recognize distinct eruptions of activism across time. Rather, feminists in each wave viewed themselves as both building on and improving the wave(s) that preceded them' (2).³⁵ Because it is almost impossible to do without the term "wave" altogether, Hewitt proposes to keep using the term "wave" but in the sense of the radio wave rather than the oceanic as Cobbe suggested earlier. For Hewitt, 'radio waves do not supersede each other. Rather signals coexist, overlap, and intersect' (8). Similarly, in her article 'Are We on a Wavelength Yet? On Feminist Oceanography, Radios, and Third Wave Feminism', Ednie Kaeh Garrison argues that

[T]he "waves" in "waves of feminism" are the technologically harnessed electromagnetic wavelengths we call radio waves. The difference in this analogy resides in the technological rhetoric of radio wave transmission and reception, and in its capacity to recognize the ways consciousness of feminism, history, and movement can be comprehended. (239)

³⁴ Describing feminist movements, Cobbe states that there are movements 'which resemble the tides of the Ocean, wherein each wave obeys one uniform impetus, and carries the waters onwards and upwards along the shore. [...] Of all the movements, political, social and religious, of past ages there is, I think, not one so unmistakably tide-like in its extension and the uniformity of its impulse, as that which has taken place among the women of almost every race on the globe. [...] [T]his movement has stirred an entire sex, even half the human race. Like the incoming tide, also, it rolled in separate waves, and each one has obeyed the same law, and has done its part in carrying forward all the rest' (xiii-xiv).

³⁵ Therefore, Hewitt highlights the fact that the contributors to her book only seek to 'destabilize standard chronologies' (7). They 'do not intentionally denigrate their foremothers nor are they especially egregious in their critiques. Rather they remind us how ubiquitous such characterizations of previous waves have become. The script of feminist history—that each wave overwhelms and exceeds its predecessor—lends itself all too easily to whiggish interpretations of even more radical, all-encompassing, and ideologically sophisticated movements' (4).

Accordingly, I regard feminism as a movement of successive radio waves in which no wave supersedes its precedents but builds on them. It can also be regarded as a circular and looping or complex dynamic movement of successive and progressive generations. Indeed, feminism should not be conceived in terms of linearity but rather more like a web or a circle, as proposed by Nancy Whittier in her *Feminist Generations: The Persistence of the Radical Women's Movement*. Whittier significantly suggests that '[i]n contrast to approaches that see each wave of protest as emerging anew, a cycle approach emphasizes links between the organizations and activists that make up successive waves of protest' (193). Indeed, ecofeminism came into being as a response to some unanswered questions and gaps in the work of previous generations of feminism. In her *Feminism and the Contradictions of Oppression* (1989), Caroline Ramazanoglu contends that '[t]he aim of empowering women indicates the need for feminism to address all forms of oppression, but it *does not indicate how this may be done*' (177-78, my italics). She also adds:

We also need to identify and to clarify the ideologies which legitimate different forms of power. The ways in which modes of production interact with systems of patriarchal and racial domination are exceedingly complex and considerably mystified. As long as these connections remain confused, it is difficult for women to organize their political priorities. (178)

According to Ramazanoglu, feminism should put an end to all oppressions, but at the time of writing in 1989, before the academicisation of ecofeminism into a coherent body of thought, she did not know how this could be achieved. Ramazanoglu anticipated the emerging tenets of ecofeminism when she suggested a possible alliance between feminism and the environment:

Women struggling for peace and the environment as feminist issues have had to trace links between male power, dominance, hierarchy and reason, and the global threat to the survival of humanity and the natural world. Resistance against male domination reveals the necessity of struggling against all forms of violence and oppression. (88)

This thesis has not only traced the origins of dualisms, but has also explored the different kinds of oppression created by these dualisms. The issue of oppression brings us to a concluding point that situates Morrison, Walker, and Robinson in a larger context. In an interview conducted by Donald Suggs in 1985, Toni Morrison suggests that until white women writers 'look at [racism] right in the eye, it will always separate us' (43). Indeed, it is this issue of addressing racism and intersectionality which mainly separates Morrison and Walker's oeuvre from that of Robinson. Ecofeminism is not a monolithic and homogenous

project, and neither are the ecofeminisms of the three writers under consideration here. I now employ the term ‘ecofeminisms’ in the plural because, after scrutinising selected fiction by these three writers, it has become evident that their aims are different. It is true that all three begin their ecofeminist journey from the same departure point, which is the deconstruction of dualisms, but they end at different destinations. Morrison’s highly developed political sense lies at the centre of all the broad corpus of her writing. Sexism, racism, and imperialism are shown to go hand in hand in her fiction. This makes her ecofeminist stance mainly political and cultural. She herself admits that: ‘I think in a real political sense’ (Morrison and Suggs 41). She also believes that any writer who does not reveal his/her political and cultural specificity is not a writer: ‘Anybody who sets out and writes a universal novel has written nothing. The more concentrated it is in terms of its culture the more revealing you find it’ (Morrison and Suggs 37).

As for Alice Walker’s ecofeminist stance, it cannot be separated from her womanist stance, as elaborated in her non-fiction and revealed and enacted in her fiction. As examined in Chapter One, a womanist is a feminist who goes further than feminism to adopt more political and, importantly, more spiritual attitudes. From an ecowomanist perspective, Walker describes herself as pagan, reclaiming that term. A pagan, as Walker explains in *The Cushion in the Road*, is ‘[o]ne who loves and worships nature, venerates and protects Mother Earth; one who cares for all of Her creatures with a degree of acceptance and tolerance’ (No Pagination). This is evident in her description of *The Color Purple* as ‘a theological text’, in her specific sense. She argues that the novel is ‘about the reclamation of one’s original God: the earth and nature. It is about reexamining the word that most colonized people are taught to loathe: pagan’ (*The Cushion in the Road*). Walker’s ecowomanist outlook, mainly based on the idea of spiritual tolerance towards all people, impels her to reject a sympathetic connection focused exclusively on women and black people, and instead to amplify the scope of communion and sympathy to include all people in the world. She rejects oppression and colonialism wherever they are practised. In *The Cushion in the Road* she discusses the contemporary conflict situations in Palestine and Burma and relates Palestinians, in their struggle to achieve freedom, to South Africans. She illustrates that oppression is an entangled network when she says: ‘The people of Palestine, like the people of South Africa, have a right to their land, their resources, their freedom’ (*The Cushion in the Road*). She adds that ‘when a lie is exposed—that Africans are merely savages, that Palestinians are merely terrorists, that women are basically servants of men or whores—there in the bright glare of our collective awareness it dies. When lies die, people live’ (*The Cushion in the Road*). Yet, Walker’s

ecowomanist stance might seem utopian and unlikely to be realised effectively in life outside of texts. She wants all people to be tolerant and to love each other, as played out in the ending of *The Color Purple*—her most exemplary work of ecowomanism—when all black characters, including Celie and Albert, tolerate each other. Even Sofia, who has been oppressed for years by the white mayor's family, loves Eleanor Jane, the mayor's daughter whom she raised, and learns to tolerate her family.

Marilynne Robinson's ecofeminism is related to what can now be safely called her ecotheology. Differing from Morrison's and Walker's theological attitudes, in which they attempt to redefine God and escape from patriarchal and imperialist definitions of God, Robinson's theology instead attempts to reconfigure people's relationship with God in her deconstruction of the God/world dualism. Robinson is often recognised for the interfusion of theology with other strands in her fiction. Indeed, it is difficult to understand Robinson's fiction without a theological framework. Through her reconceptualisation of the wilderness as a space of religious nature, Robinson challenges the claim that Christianity is incompatible with wilderness preservation; she reinvests wilderness as a site for spiritual practice—as illustrated in Lila's baptism scene in *Lila*. In her book *Christianity, Wilderness, and Wildlife*, Susan Power Bratton investigates 'how the Bible relates wilderness to spirituality' (19). She defines wilderness spirituality as 'those portions of the wilderness experience having an impact on one's relationship with God' (19-20). This wilderness spirituality is what Lila encounters in *Lila* and what John Ames develops through his relationship with Lila in *Gilead*.³⁶ Although Robinson has written only four novels, very few compared to the prolific corpuses of Morrison and Walker, there are still important areas in her fiction and thinking that have remained unexplored. One of these is the political dimension of her work, especially the Gilead trilogy.³⁷ This thesis has attempted to show how her political thinking, like that of Morrison and Walker, and other posthumanist ecofeminists, is bound up with a fundamentally critical relation to dualisms which have underpinned and structured Western philosophical thinking about gender, race, nature, the political and the environment since Plato. The objective in writing the thesis has been to open up a set of fundamental questions

³⁶ It is beyond the scope of this thesis to enquire deeply into this issue of Robinson's ecotheology, but George B. Handley is currently preparing a book on ecotheology in Marilynne Robinson's fiction, entitled: *From Chaos to Cosmos: The Environmental Humanities as Ecotheology*. This book is a further development of his 2015-article 'Religion, Literature, and the Environment in the Work of Marilynne Robinson'.

³⁷ The collection edited by Shannon L. Mariotti and Joseph H. Lane Jr. in 2016, entitled *A Political Companion to Marilynne Robinson*, fails to examine Robinson's unusual definition of politics and her model of politics in comparison with other feminist writers who place politics at the forefront of their writing, such as Toni Morrison and Alice Walker.

that can be explored further in relation to the work of other ecofeminists and in ecofeminism as an important field in contemporary writing.

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