



GYNOCENTRIC GRANULES IN GLORIA NAYLOR'S MAMA DAY

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Abstract

This paper strews a panoramic view of Gynocentrism as a literary critical theory and its ramification in the form of the human relationship. Gynocentrism is a radical feminist dictum that scrutinizes the identity crises, culture, psychic, and the social consciousness female with the women-centered approach. Gynocentrism is perhaps best conjectured as a traditional phase in feminist theory, which concedes its voice for addressing the wholesale marginalization of women's voice.

In *Mama Day*, gynocentric granules can be excavated with the implication of femininity that acts the centre having its impact on every course of action. Though women like Sapphira Wade, Bascombe Wade, Miranda or *Mama Day*, *Cocoa* or *Ophelia* and *Ruby* have been acquainted as the centre of action, Naylor has both positively and negatively depicted their mystiques.

Keywords: Gynocentrism, Gynocriticism, androcentrism.

The term 'Gynocentrism' has been construed from the Greek words namely, 'Gyno' and 'Kentron'. The meaning of Gyno is 'woman' and Kentron is 'center'. Gynocentrism literally accords the meaning of how a woman is being centralized in a cameo, having scrutinized disparate aspects of her culture, belief, and ideologies. Similarly, Gynocentrism parallels with androcentricism, which mainly focuses on male instead of female. Though Feminism has not invented gynocentrism, it however, leads gynocentrism to a new level.

Gynocentric spotlight of feminism does not necessarily mean that certain feminists are unaware of issues facing males or unsympathetic to them. Additionally, while focusing on women, feminism can still fight for the social structures that are also pernicious to men. Gynocentric feminism thus, prompts a vision of femininity and odds with androcentric and misogynist formulations that have traditionally been assigned to women. It extols femininity as a source of values by which, it castigates the androcentric society. Gynocentrism is perhaps best seen as a traditional phase in feminist theory, which capitulates its voice for addressing the wholesale marginalization of women's voice.

On the contrary to gynocentrism, Elaine Showalter an American critic, feminist and writer quibbles for the realignment of the conceptual standpoints of literary studies by seeing writings of women as primary rather than marginal. She also flicks to identify the aberration in women's penning and investigates how psychodynamics of female creativity shapes the literary productions and readings differently from those of men. Having coined a new appellation, 'Gynocritics' in her cameo, *Towards A Feminist Poetics*, she contends that the programme of gynocritics is to evolve a female frame work for the analysis of women's literature and to develop new methods based on the study of female experience rather than to adopt male's models and theories. In order to diagnose the female difference, the gynocritical approach is sought to study the history, styles, themes, genres and structure of penmanship by women. The writers like, Adrienne Rich and Susan Griffin have also manifested the gynocritical writing. Similarly, Helene Cixous's, *Theorization of L'écriture Feminine* (feminine writing and language) has also discussed the values of gynocriticism.

Gynocentrism interrogates traditional and accepted male ideas like how women feel, act, and how in general, they manage to live their life. Gynocentric tinges have copiously been interlaced in Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* with the portrayal of Sapphira Wade, Bascombe Wade, Miranda or *Mama Day*, *Cocoa* or *Ophelia* and *Ruby* who all determine the robust movement of the plot of this cameo. Thus, the Day family, a community of black women, perpetuates their cultural memory through the repetition of material practices that include cooking, and weaving through the transmission of the personal and communal stories in Willow Springs. Naylor's vision on the experience of black women in *Mama Day* is however, far from other African writers. She rather ventures her women as the symbol of emancipation of a clan or society. Primarily, through *Mama Day*, she probes the different ways of conceiving relationships, history, and reality of the black people. Naylor privileges the dynamism of the Willow Spring's living memory over the representations of the past attempted by the west-oriented mind. In this regard, Naylor tries to represent the life of the black without much exaggeration. Furthermore, she also accentuates these facets quoting the life of Sapphira Wade and Bascombe Wade who are the girandoles for the creation of the fictitious island, Willow Spring as:



It's about a slave woman (Sapphira Wade) who brought a whole new meaning, soon as you cross over here from beyond the bridge. . . persuaded Bascombe Wade in a thousand days to deed all his slaves every inch of land in Willow Springs, poisoned him for trouble, to go on and bear seven sons by person or persons unknown.(01)

Naylor's idea of representing the things, as it exists in a particular bailiwick i.e. (Africa) has also been reverberated with the ideas of the anthropologist Liisa Malkki as: "Botanical metaphors, metaphors of kinship, maps, and family trees present the 'national order of things' as the natural order of things" (26). In *Mama Day*, Naylor illustrates her women as the commanding forces in the socio-religious, cultural and familial facets. The novel originates with the characterization of Sapphira Wade and her ancestral heritage in Willow Springs where she is being pictured as the most persuasive and potent woman with the efficacy of magic:

She could walk through a lighting storm without being touched; grab a bolt of lightning in the palm of her hand; use the heat of lightning to start the kindling going under her medicine pot; depending upon which of us takes a mind to her. She turned the moon into slave, the stars into a swaddling cloth, and healed the wounds of every creature walking up on two or down on four. (1) In this context, Naylor typically indicates the assertive role of supernatural, ritual elements and communal rites blended with the life of the black women.

In the Gynocentric perspective, Naylor divulges Sapphira Wade as a woman sorcerer having been endowed with all power and preponderance to govern the entire island. When she constitutes Sapphira Wade, she appends an additional flavor of having ascertained her land as: "Willow Springs. Everybody knows but nobody talks about the legend of describes Sapphira Wade. A true conjure woman: satin black, biscuit cream, red as Georgia clay: depending upon which of us takes a mind to her" (01). Naylor accounts the so-called colour 'black' and hails it to ostend the unique beauty of blacks, from the perception of others even though, it is rehashed as the symbol of sad and demise.

For instance, Sapphira Wade, a black lass has the humanistic amore on her fellow beings. She does not fully utilize her magical powers for hidden motives, rather pilfers it with the positive intent. Naylor usually tenders her women with exceptional power to revolutionize the society and demonstrates them with the supernatural elements to execute the same. When she labels the dwellings of African women, she confluences the real and supernatural world having projected them as the lodestars of the society. Moreover, Naylor carefully tailors the stories of the black yet rebellious woman, Sapphira Wade, through the title character Miranda 'Mama Day' and her great-niece Cocoa. In the characterization of Cocoa's island Willow Springs; Naylor accentuates how locale plays a cardinal role in the life of the black people as . . . the way we saw it, American ain't entered the question at all, when it came to our land: Sapphira was African-born, Bascombe wads was from Norway. . . and we wasn't even Americans when we got it--was slaves. And the laws about slaves not owning in Georgia and South Carolina don't apply, 'cause the land wasn't then--and isn't now--in either of them places. (5)

Like Sapphira Wade, Mama Day has also been conferred as the chief character having granted with magical powers and positive traits. She succors Bernice, a young woman who craves pregnancy to beget a child. Though Mama Day is not a biological mother to anyone, she herself gathers fresh eggs, bakes the welcome home cakes, and thereby looks after Bernice. Naylor delineates her as the real mother in Willow Springs for her timely aid to the people of that island. Her endowment in instituting a family is well-stated as:

There's a new fertility drug they carry over at the store. It's supposed to work miracles. . . Two of our customers already got pregnant from it. Miranda sighs. Then go to the clinic and see if Dr. Smithfield will get it for you. . . She breaks a fresh egg so that the yolk stay whole. Cupping the shell in her hand, she watches for a while as the bloated yellow swims in the thick mucous-not this month. She breaks another egg. . . But she would make up the ground raspberry for Bernice. 19-20)

As far as Gynocentric vantage is concerned, though Mama Day is a magician with all powers, it is her rudimental feministic instinct as a woman, induces her to assist Bernice to get pregnancy. Iris Marion Young in her essay, *Humanism, Gynocentrism and Feminist Politics* argues:

Gynocentric feminism finds in women's bodies as the traditional feminine activity and the source of more positive values. Women's reproductive process keeps the nature safe and promotes life to a greater degree than men. . . Our feminine socialization and traditional mothers give us a capacity to nurture and a sense of cooperation that may be only salvation of the planet (Young 79)

In the Gynocentric speck, African women are closely confederated with their familial system, which composes of their cultural, social, ritual, ethnic, and linguistic liaison with their society. Having presented the love between a black rural



woman Cocoa and a white urban man George, Naylor astutely tries to make a dichotomy between their choices. Through their relationship, she underscores the issue of maintaining black cultural identity in the white dominated world to establish a unique black world. Paula Gallant Eckard observes this issue as:

Willow Springs is a black community whose history pre-dates the Civil War. As in oral history, magic, mystery, and legend provide the cornerstones of the collective history of the place. While race figures into the manifestation of the other in *Mama Day*, the bonds shared within the female community and between generations of women seem to be the strongest elements. (15)

In the gynocentric cognition, Naylor dramatizes how the superiority of women influences the perception of male having presented black woman called, *Mama Day*, and the white man George. In this regard, she does not simply show her women oppressing male, rather presents their impact over the androcentric world. Moreover, she carefully uses the names of the characters in *Mama Day* to represent black and white colour complexion. For instance, George as the name in English origin represents that he is from the white community, whereas the appellation of other women characters depicted show that they are all typically from the black world. When *Mama Day* causes Ruby's house to be struck twice by lightning that makes the rational George to have a belief over it. Naylor affords the readers a rational out in explaining *Mama Day's* powers:

It struck twice in the same place. Theoretically, it is possible but not probable, for lightning to strike twice in exactly the same place. The first exchange of electrical charges between the ground and the clouds, which in a sense is a strike, causes the negative-charge center up in the clouds to short circuit and nullify itself . . .that is rare. Unless, of course, in a scientific experiment someone purposefully electrifies the ground with materials that hold both negative and positive charges to increase. No one was running around with that kind of knowledge in Willow Springs. (274).

In the Gynocentric prospect, African women as the centre of their familial system, always have very close reciprocity with nature. For instance, Miranda's bounded relationship with nature, perceives spiritual beauty, which has its own contumacious rules and gives joy in her life. Her reaction in cherishing the natural beauty of sunset is delineated as:

Miranda kinda blooms when the evening air hits her skin. They say every blessing hides a curse and every curse a blessing. And with all of the aggravation belonging to a slow fall, it'll give you a sunset to stop your breath, no matter how long you been on the island. It seems like God reached way down into his box of paints found the purest reds, the deepest purples, and a dab of midnight blue, then just kinda trailed His fingers along the curve of the horizon and let'em all bleed down. (78)

Thus, the gynocentric traces have well been tailored in order to flaunt the femininity as the centre for the course of any action. In *Mama Day*, women have been accorded as the prologue and epilogue in this cameo, having determined the movement of the plot. Though the idiosyncratic trait of women has had both positive and negative facets, they all have been applauded to have such uniqueness in their life.

By manifesting the life of George with Cocoa, Naylor ferries a message that the astuteness of the lasses sometimes even guides men to find out the right path. Furthermore, having portrayed the characters like Ruby and Miranda, Naylor underscores a message that a woman is the sole companion to other woman. Similarly, when Sapphira Wade is shown as a woman with impeccable magical powers succeeding all her foes, her valor in establishing her own kingdom is highly eulogized by Naylor. She thus becomes a revolutionary artist who staunchly feels that only a revolution in the consciousness of the black people can save the black community from imminent disaster of the white dominated world. If the choice is between the soul and success, she thinks that the black community should select the soul. She even goes to the extent that her own people can even suffer to sustain their pride. Thus, her staunch belief on her ethnicity can obviously be elucidated from her interview, For the Afro-Americans, regardless of where you climb on the ladder of success there will be racism. Under these conditions, if you give up what centers you, what is unique in you, then you are lost. The greatness of this country is the uniqueness of its people. But, there is pressure to amalgamate and that is suicidal when it happens to the Afro-American. (36).

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