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## Review Paper

## Exploring Ecofeminist Themes in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Christina Dalcher's *Vox*

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### ABSTRACT

Ecofeminism is a philosophical framework that explores the intersections between environmental degradation and the oppression of women. It examines how patriarchal systems of power contribute to both ecological harm and gender-based subjugation, asserting dominance over women's bodies and the natural world. According to ecofeminist theory, the objectification and control of both women and nature stem from the same ideological roots, which sustain systems of oppression. Through an ecofeminist lens, Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Christina Dalcher's *Vox* can be comparatively analysed to reveal how both texts engage with issues of control, resistance, and the erosion of both body and mind within gendered structures. This paper offers a comparative perspective on the portrayal of ecofeminist themes in *The Bluest Eye* and *Vox*, emphasising how each narrative reflects the convergence of social, environmental, and gender-based concerns.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Ecofeminism, or ecological feminism—first introduced by Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974—builds its foundation on the convergence of environmental and feminist ideologies. It has evolved in response to emerging social movements and alternative frameworks of thought. Misogynistic behaviour toward women, whether in the workplace, within the family, or across broader societal structures, is seen as a central root of women's oppression (*Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*). Although the origins of this oppression are debated, extensive research in the humanities has contributed to a deeper understanding of its historical and cultural dimensions. The manifestation of women's oppression varies across societies—some legalise or overtly ignore it, while

others perpetuate it more subtly (*Ecofeminism and Literature*). Compounding this issue are systemic economic inequalities, unequal legal protections, and the difficulties women face in pursuing justice for harassment or violence. Examples include discriminatory laws that treat women differently from men, as well as pervasive sexism embedded in societal norms (*Feminist Ecocriticism: Environment, Women, and Literature* 13). Over recent decades, ecofeminism has gained significant traction as a critical field of inquiry. At its core, ecofeminism emphasises the intersection of ecological concerns and feminist critique. Historically, women have been symbolically aligned with nature, while men have been associated with culture and civilisation—a dichotomy that ecofeminist scholars continue to interrogate

(*Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*).

In modern times, ecofeminism has emerged as an important movement in the establishment and explanation of the relationship between men's control of women and nature while combining women's liberation and environmental protection. It aims to eliminate the taboos related to gender oppression due to the proximity in the relationships between gender oppression and nature's oppression by man. The elimination of both types of oppression (women and nature) by man is attained by formulating a new theory for the feminist approach. To create a more practical environmental ethic, ecofeminists make a compelling case for exposing the conceptual and metaphorical connections between gender, class, race, and literary interpretations of nature (*Ecofeminist Literary Criticism* 228). Additionally, ecofeminists portray a strong point of view in appreciation of non-human nature, along with stopping environmental degradation. However, ecofeminists' arguments related to racial intersection, gender, sexuality and nature still require wider recognition. The oppression of women, children, poor people and people of colour, along with the environment, is associated in different ways and hence must be considered simultaneously.

In contrast to men, women are more affected by disproportionality and therefore are more prone to face hardships and risks. Although women exhibit different views and opinions on the nature and advantages of ecofeminism, however, many concur that ecology is a feminist problem. The core tenets of ecofeminism are based on certain ideas that suggest significant connections between the oppression of women and that of the natural world. In order to comprehend the repression of women and that of nature, it is crucial to map the links within these networks. As a result, ecofeminism has become a viable movement that envisions a social transformation as a result of women's efforts to achieve sustainability in their families and communities. These movements mainly encompass the voices against the maldevelopments and the environmental degradation resulting from patriarchal dominance, global capitalism and multinational corporations (*Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*).

The term "ecocriticism," a semi-coinage of "Eco," the acronym for ecology, which refers to the study of the relationship between living beings and their natural surroundings, is closely related to the analytical phrase Eco-feminine (Puleo 27). Ecofeminism has been linked to the relationship between literature and the environment, or it has illustrated the connection between the relationship between man and his physical surroundings and the literary sensibility of the problematic feminine world (*Gender and Nature: A Psychological Analysis of Ecofeminist Theory* 2412). Although ecofeminism covers a wide range of topics, the fundamental idea of ecofeminine sensibility is its interlinkage with ecology, which examines the relationships between species as well as how different human sources take advantage of them. Literary interpretations of ecofeminism hold that the oppressive system is the same and that all forms of oppression are connected.

Like other movements, ecofeminism's main objective is to liberate women from the thought of nature and "Others" and to end all forms of male and social oppression. In addition to discussing issues like mechanical reproduction and the effects of deforestation on indigenous culture, it encourages individuals to reconnect with nature. It also raises the issue of hazardous areas near those living in poverty. The concept also touches on issues like climate change, new politics, marginalised people, and economics. In a nutshell, ecofeminism aims to promote values and behaviours that preserve life (*Ecofeminism, Bloomsbury Publishing* 142).

According to ecofeminist thinkers, the origins of environmental oppression trace back before the scientific revolution. They offer various perspectives on how different forms of oppression are functioning globally, with patriarchal religion at the centre. The veneration of male deities in numerous cultures was enabled by societies that honoured goddesses. In the belief systems centred around goddess worship, both women's fertility and the land's abundance were celebrated (*An Overview of Ecofeminism: Women, Nature and Hierarchies*). Divinity was perceived as inherently present, without a gender hierarchy. Women were compared to fields that would nurture the male seed following gestation. Societies that focused on goddess worship transitioned to those that prioritised male deities as patriarchal religions gained influence. It was believed that both nature and women should be controlled by male dominance. Another viewpoint suggested that the reproductive roles and life-giving capabilities of women sharply contrasted with the death-centred aims of male society. The concepts of "the exploitation of nature," "mother nature," and "untouched forests" further feminised both nature and women. Ecofeminists contend that since women and children face the most severe consequences of injustice and environmental harm, environmental matters are inherently connected to feminist issues (*The Rape of Mother Nature* 258). Ecofeminists are also deeply concerned about environmental racism, which refers to the practice of situating environmentally hazardous materials or facilities in racially marginalised communities globally, primarily due to the race and lack of power among those populations.

### Aspects of Ecofeminism in The Bluest Eye

In the late 1960s, African American author Toni Morrison made history as the first female black editor of fiction at Random House in New York. She felt a sense of satisfaction after her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, was published in 1970 and became a financial and scholastic hit. Her widely acclaimed work *Song of Solomon*, which was published in 1977, brought her both domestic and worldwide acclaim for her talent and uniqueness. The National Book Critics Circle Award was granted for this well-known novel. As a creative talent, she made a big impact and won the Pulitzer Prize in 1988 for her novel *Beloved*, published in 1987. The fact that she received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2011 attests to her global nature. Through all of her works, she established herself as a writer for Black women and Black people in the 1970s and 1980s. Because of her fame and impact, most of her books and short tales have been adapted into

films and TV series. Her most famous works, like *Beloved*, were adapted into films that paid close attention to current events in real life, showcasing her extraordinary character, creativity, sensibility, and flair.

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* embodies all of the ideas discussed above, including environmental racism, oppression, reproduction, and patriarchy. Additionally, rejection, beauty, love, sex, racism, feminism, and eco-feminism are among the topics and ideas that are reflected in the book. It conveys the idea of disruption and abnormal seasonal changes related to the life of the eleven-year-old heroine, Pecola. It tells the story of a black girl who experiences racial rejection and becomes fixated on the idea of using prayer to get blue eyes. It is evident in the narration that matriarchal societies are anti-hierarchical, with a philosophy of equal distribution of labour and harmony within the natural environment. In these communities, the majority of the means of sustenance were owned by women. The majority of critics of ecofeminism believe that patriarchy is the primary cause of the current unsustainable state of affairs. In this sense, Morrison made her formal debut in the creative writing world with her book *The Bluest Eye*, which tells the story of a black girl who wants blue eyes for both beauty and the attraction of men.

Two teenage sisters, Frieda and Claudia Mac Teer, unintentionally offer a perspective from which to interpret the plot of the book. It depicts the terrible effects of racism and how white standards of beauty are framed as a result, destroying the sense of self of a young black girl named Pecola Breedlove. The protagonist of the book has internalised the notion that only people with white skin and blue eyes are loved, and that those like her, who are black, are meant to be exploited rather than loved. She so secretly longs for blue eyes, which ultimately led her into a degrading condition of madness, as the narrative recounts her life over the course of four seasons. As a result, Pecola suffers from a serious identity crisis, which is exacerbated by the fact that her father rapes her regularly and gets her pregnant. When she attempts to explain it to her entire community, they reject her, torture her, and drive her crazy rather than standing by her side. Because it portrays black people as less complex than other races, the work stands out as a powerful voice in the literary landscape that aims to be portrayed, criticised, and questioned within the parameters of beauty. Despite generating a variety of reactions, the story delves deeply into the issues of self-identity and self-esteem, intertwining them with the concurrent prejudice against people based on their race and gender.

From the novel, *The Bluest Eye*, this idea can be applied to Morrison's writings, as evidenced by the important thematic concerns she has with nature and women. The novel is regularly examined from a postcolonial feminist and psychoanalytic perspective. Comparing the book to notions of ecofeminism and Morrison's early concepts can also help one understand it better. By questioning and containing the logic that persecutes both Negro women and nature, the novel's utilisation of natural imagery contrasts the fate of women with that of nature and accentuates the multiple constraints that Negro women endure

from white culture and men. In this work, Morrison offers a persuasive argument against the institutionalised and ideological and linguistic subversion of a textbook which places more emphasis on whiteness than on blackness. Pecola becomes insane and suffers from societal abuse as a result of her parents' lack of love and concern for society, whereas Claudia and her sister Frieda benefit from their parents' affection and encouragement as they grow up healthy and take care of themselves for the betterment of the future.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison sets the story in a small Midwestern town, where Black identity plays a central role in shaping the community. Pecola Breedlove, the protagonist, prays each night for blue eyes like Shirley Temple's, believing that possessing them will make everything in her life better. Morrison's narrative illustrates how white civilisation oppresses Black women and distorts their relationship with nature, intertwining women's fate with natural elements. As Morrison writes, "Each night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes. Fervently, for a year she had prayed. Although somewhat discouraged, she was not without hope. To have something as wonderful as that happen would take a long, long time" (*The Bluest Eye* 45).

At the centre of the novel is one of the most vulnerable members of society—a young Black girl—who becomes the object of scorn and internalises that hatred. She resists not only societal mockery but also the psychological trauma imposed upon her. The narrative is structured around the four seasons—autumn, winter, spring, and summer—symbolising the cyclical nature of suffering and false renewal. The novel's complexity is heightened by its dual narrative perspective, which adds depth to its exploration of trauma, memory, and identity. Recurring themes such as the psychological acceptance of physical deformity, environmental and emotional chaos, disrupted seasonal order, barren landscapes, and taboo sexuality contribute to its haunting power. The story begins with a "botanical aberration"—a distorted reference to natural order—marking a rupture in silence and the articulation of what was once unspeakable. This opening gesture signifies more than a shared secret; it announces a confrontation with deep social and psychological violence. Embedded within the novel are ecofeminist concerns, including the exploitation of women by patriarchal systems, the trauma of childbirth, and the control and definition of female identity within male-dominated societal structures.

The book highlights the parallels between Pecola and Earth, highlighting how both are arid and unforgiving, with chaotic lives and seasons. It links the inconsequential killing of a black girl and a slight disruption in seasonal vegetation. Here, Pecola's life disorders are connected to the disorder of the seasons. The novel's opening line, "Quiet as it is kept," discloses startling facts. Claudia, the kid narrator, explains that "it was because Pecola was having her father's baby that the marigolds did not grow". After all, they did not blossom during the autumn season. There is conjecture that the disturbance of nature is a social disturbance that has disastrous personal repercussions. It may seem so clear that the natural and human worlds are inseparable

that it's difficult to believe that they are typically discussed independently. Nature and the earth represent women and their femininity. Earth creates and changes with the seasons, just as a woman goes through menstruation, fertility, childbirth, and creation. The male dominance takes advantage of and harasses Earth and women, who are synchronised. The battle and protest of earth and woman are destructive and symbolic, even if it is clear that they are both peaceful when being held. A stroke that indicates something more than a shared secret, an unspeakable thing finally spoken, is provided by the extremely dramatic paragraph at the beginning. It marks the conclusion of the book and provides a synopsis of Pecola's entire journey and the causes of her demise, as quoted:

Quiet as it's kept, there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941. We thought, at the time, that it was because Pecola was having her father's baby that the marigolds did not grow. A little examination and much less melancholy would have proved to us that our seeds were not the only ones that did not sprout; nobody's did. It was a long time before my sister and I admitted to ourselves that no green was going to spring from our seeds. For years, I thought my sister was right: it was my fault. I had planted them too far down in the earth. It never occurred to either of us that the earth itself might have been unyielding. We had dropped our seeds in our own little plot of black dirt just as Pecola's father had dropped his seeds in his own plot of black dirt. Our innocence and faith were no more productive than his lust and despair. What is clear now is that of all of that hope, fear, lust, love and grief, nothing remains but Pecola and the unyielding earth. (*The Bluest Eye* 4)

According to the passage above, Pecola's pregnancy with her father's child was the reason why marigolds did not bloom that year. The explanation is pretty crazy, strange, and ridiculous. There are no signs of life or greenery in the area. Pecola and the ground are desolate and bare. Pecola's rape serves as a metaphor for the rape of the planet. Despite being planted in Pecola's womb and the plot of black dirt on Earth, the seeds are not successful in producing any fruit. Pecola's father's lust and sorrow ruin Frieda and Claudia's innocence and faith. The seeds perished from suffocation because they were buried too deeply in the ground. For them, there was no sense of freedom or love. The seeds sown in the womb of Earth and Pecola would yield no green or life. The novel's beginning supports its conclusion, which is that death and despair are the only things left after all of the desire, love, sadness, fear, and hope. The novel's division into four seasons is an important one. The seasons—fall, winter, spring, and summer—are reflected in the names of the chapters. Autumn marks the start of it, and summer marks its conclusion. The lives of the characters in the book are closely linked to the seasons. Here, the autumn season alludes to the end of life. As Frieda sings, "when the deep purple falls over sleepy garden walls, someone thinks of me," the novel's autumnal season symbolises both love and sadness. She recalls how someone came in, adjusted the flannel, and put their hands on her forehead when she had a cold and a cough. Thus, those hands that wish to keep her alive come to mind when she thinks about fall. The novel's allusion to dandelions provides insight into

Pecola's innermost thoughts. She looks at the beloved and treasured pictures of dandelions. She questions why they are not regarded as flowers but rather as weeds. The dandelions were removed from the garden because they were deemed too unsightly and unattractive to be cultivated there. She uses dandelions as a way to describe her experience of unfathomable guilt and rejection. She gives them a loving glance, but she doesn't get the same response. Finally, she portrays herself as a mere ugly weed. The absence of marigolds and the failure of Frieda and Claudia's seeds to germinate are more indications of the season. The ground refused to give way. Both Pecola's baby and the seeds withered and died. It also talks about their home, Pecola's brother Sammy, and her parents' relationship. This section also reveals how they all put on a mask of ugliness and put up with themselves. Pecola starts to yearn for blue eyes throughout this season. Morrison has described the family's ugly nature in these words, as quoted;

Except for the father, Cholly—whose ugliness is described as a product of "despair, dissipation, and violence directed toward petty things and weak people"—the rest of the Breedlove family wears their ugliness as if it belongs to them, even though it does not. Mrs Breedlove, Sammy, and Pecola each internalise this imposed identity. Morrison describes them in dehumanising detail: "The eyes, the small eyes set closely together under narrow foreheads. The low, irregular hairlines, which seemed even more irregular in contrast to the straight, heavy eyebrows, which nearly met. Keen but crooked noses, with insolent nostrils. They had high cheekbones, and their ears turned forward. Shapely lips which called attention not to themselves but to the rest of the face" (*The Bluest Eye* 38). This passage illustrates how societal perceptions of beauty—and ugliness—are projected onto Black bodies, becoming internalised and embodied over time.

Winter, the upcoming season, begins with a description of Claudia's father. The season is compared to his facial traits. He lacks warmth and is a frigid dude. Winter has taken up residence in his face for good. His bowed eyebrows resemble leafless trees or are expressionless and outdated, and his white eyes threaten to avalanche. His skull is dark and frozen, while his skin is light and yellow. Claudia, Frieda, and Pecola also experienced a stiffened, nasty knot over the winter. They bided their time until spring. However, Maureen Peal, a new student at the school, undid the knot and caused trouble. She is linked to the spring season and seen as a season disruptor. The seasonal moods could be disturbed and changed by Maureen's attractiveness. Pecola's school life and humiliations are also highlighted in this season. In contrast to the generalised views of white people towards black people, Claudia's opinions as a narrator generalise all white "beautiful" girls.

Oddly, Pecola, Frieda, and Claudia's lives are impacted by spring. "Spring meant a change in whipping style," Claudia explains (*The Bluest Eye* 58). They receive different beatings. The slender, green, and indestructible twigs lash them. She is reminded of new green switches that lost their sting long after the beating was ended, and of harsh whippings throughout this season. Given the number of incidents that occur during the



spring, it may be said that this is the most significant season. This article discusses Pecola's parents, Pauline and Charles Breedlove, and their strained marriage. Pecola's father rapes her in this slender springtime light.

Claudia was terrified of the summer's strong, unexpected storms. She was afraid even of the prospect of summer. Strawberry tightness, dust, falling skies, storms, dry days, and sticky nights are all associated with summer. Seasons are portrayed as the outcomes of their brief existence in the statement "seasons become the Moirai of our lives" (*The Bluest Eye* 58). The unnaturalness of the seasons exposes the disorderly lives and fates. This season also shows how Pecola, who was destined to die, was discovered among the trash that was discarded by others. Only Frieda and Claudia prayed for Pecola's unborn child. The baby does not survive even though they sowed the seeds and spoke the baby's magic words. Maddened by blue eyes, Pecola believes and experiences hallucinations that she has blue eyes. She cannot believe that even if she were to receive *The Bluest Eye*, she would never be considered "beautiful" in contrast to the standard of beauty set by white American society, since she is so ingrained with the belief that her features and colour make her ugly.

Towards the end of the book, Claudia states, "I talk about how I did not plant the seeds too deeply," (*The Bluest Eye* 37), reversing her first assertion that she had sown the seeds too deeply in the ground. Claudia realises at the end that the ground, not the seeds, was to blame. The marigolds faced hostility from the entire planet that year. Some types of seeds and blooms had been rejected by the ground. It didn't produce any results. However, one must conclude that the victim or seeds had no right to survive when the soil itself rejects them. Victims are accused of being at fault. However, at least on the outskirts or at the end of the city, where the seeds were sown, it was too late to make a difference and too late to be planted. Thus, without any of those seasons occurring, it was autumn, spring, winter, and summer. It is said that when something prohibited occurs, nature responds by becoming dangerous. The greatest forbidden transgression was for a father to rape his daughter and conceive her. The ground also ceases yielding as a result of this response. It provides context for the dreaded culmination of illegal, traumatic, and inexplicable sex. The readers will undoubtedly be shocked and perplexed. In addition to touching the reader, Claudia's narration of the book brings them to tears. Claudia's story evokes both conscience and consciousness by using dirt as a metaphor for Pecola's womb and by acknowledging that, in Pecola's instance, she bore them.

This research paper examines the ideology of Black women as presented in the novel, highlighting the dynamics of power where white individuals exert dominance over Black individuals, influenced by natural factors, as interpreted through the lens of ecofeminist theory. While this concept may resonate with related ideas, it also seeks to broaden the discourse surrounding literary concerns. A close reading of the novel reveals the author's deep engagement with ecofeminine sensitivity and her reflections on the struggles faced by Black women in the United States. Morrison's latest work explores the intricate relationship

between women and nature, a subject of significant interest to ecofeminists. To illustrate Morrison's ecofeminist consciousness, the analysis delves into the profound literary significance of the novel and the author, while also critiquing the environmental studies that examine the interplay between human nature and behaviour from an ecofeminist standpoint.

### Aspects of ecofeminism in *Vox*

Ecofeminism is a blend of ecological and feminist perspectives that examines the link between the exploitation of nature and the subjugation of women. Ecofeminism's important aspects are often brought to light in conversations on platforms such as *Vox*. Intersectionality is a key concept in ecofeminism that stresses the interconnectedness of different types of oppression, like gender, race, class, and environmental harm. *Vox* frequently delves into these overlapping areas, examining how environmental issues tend to impact marginalised communities to a greater extent. Ecofeminists criticise capitalist systems that value profits more than environmental well-being and social equity. *Vox* may explore how capitalist practices contribute to environmental harm and worsen gender disparities. Ecofeminism supports sustainable practices that benefit environmental health and social well-being. *Vox* frequently talks about sustainable solutions, highlighting the significance of care and community-centred strategies for environmental issues. Ecofeminism frequently delves into the spiritual connection between humans and nature, advocating for a moral duty to care. *Vox* may explore how these viewpoints impact modern environmentalism and ethics. Platforms like *Vox* contribute to the larger conversation on ecofeminism by discussing these topics, underscoring the importance of comprehensive strategies to address environmental and social concerns (*Vox* 2).

Set in a bleak modern American society, Dalcher's impactful novel narrates a tale of confrontations, challenges, and the fight for autonomy and liberation. In this oppressive totalitarian environment, women's rights and particularly their voices are entirely silenced by the government's patriarchal and religious beliefs. Electrical metal bands equipped on all women and girls nationwide restrict their speech to just 100 words daily. A woman lacking a voice completely forfeits her sense of independence and freedom. In the narrative, a mother and aphasia researcher named Dr Jean McClellan is assigned to work on the government's Wernicke Project to find a cure for the President's brother, who has severe brain damage. She swiftly realises that the true aim of the government is to convert the remedy into a bioweapon designed to cause aphasia in individuals who oppose its measures. Her quest for control over both language and her physical self-empowers her to regain her autonomy, subsequently impacting the lives of her daughter and the other women depicted in the story.

Modern critics believe dystopian texts accurately reflect the current situation instead of predicting the future. In our current tech-savvy society, feminist dystopian literature has become increasingly popular as the line between speculative stories and real-world politics blurs. These texts discuss gender beliefs and problems, frequently utilising modern societal circumstances to

showcase the sexism ingrained in patriarchal cultures. This paper attempts to provide analytics and assess the different forms of violence encountered by the female protagonist, as well as explore how the body functions as a site of conflict and resolution within the narrative. The paper aims to examine the novel *Vox* (2018) by author Christina Dalcher from an angle of feminist dystopia to emphasise the excessive violence directed towards women and the eventual transformation of the female body into a source of self-expression and defiance against the oppressive regime, thereby providing an ecofeminist point of view. Additionally, the establishment of a narrative environment where the female body changes from a fixed object of portrayal to a powerful focus of the text in the novel is also portrayed.

This novel was selected for its relevance to the study that will concentrate on ecofeminism and its impact. Christina Dalcher's book, *Vox*, reveals how women are limited in their abilities to pursue their desires and receive a quality education, thereby exploring the impact of a new ruling by the government that led to a crisis and disrupted the equilibrium of rights between men and women, driven by fear of women potentially surpassing men in leadership or intelligence. The novel's portrayal of ecofeminism is not well known, and by the time women do, things have gotten out of hand. The significance of studying ecofeminism lies in providing a deeper understanding of the presence of hate or bias against women and its impact on women's experiences.

Christina Dalcher's *Vox* showcases the potential of women through the character of Christina, as evident in the quote, "You're the cognitive linguist," (*Vox* 3) remarks Patrick, clearing plates and prompting Steven to do the same. Jean, the main character, is portrayed as one of the standout women in the narrative. She is a neurolinguist, as Patrick describes, working in cognitive linguistics. Dr Jean, a nickname given to her by colleagues who also oversee a lab, eventually achieved a breakthrough in finding a remedy for brain Aphasia, a condition that impairs a person's ability to communicate effectively. Jean also has a group of friends who come together to discuss various topics. Patrick referred to night-outs with the girls as "Hen parties," but didn't mean it negatively. It was simply something that guys would say. Jean and her female companions exemplify career-oriented women with capabilities and a strong understanding. Book clubs are created for discussing various topics and increasing knowledge through listening to different perspectives. They discuss political issues and are knowledgeable about various problems occurring in today's society, which could pose a threat to them. Characteristics of females who hold worth are vocal and defy societal expectations. The quote below highlights women's role in the political landscape when Dalcher asserts;

The percentage decreased from nineteen to ten, thanks to California, New York, and Florida. Jackie stopped to verify that I was still paying attention. "We'll return to the early nineties after the upcoming midterms, I mean." Reduce the representation by half once more, and we are entering the era of the 1970s (*Vox* 23).

Jackie discusses the House of Representatives in the quote. "The House of Representatives has equal responsibilities in legislation as the Senate" (*Vox* 23). According to Jackie, the House Representative's representation is dwindling, possibly due to government efforts to diminish public participation in legislation, allowing the government to gain control over the nation. Jackie also describes the negative outcome if the situation continues, which could result in the country regressing to the state it was in during the early nineties or 1970s. Jackie assesses the complete political scenario effectively, serving as a prime example of an educated woman capable of guiding and accomplishing numerous feats. Jackie's protest in response to the Senate and House of Representatives situation results in the misogynistic character in the story displaying animosity towards women who speak out, thereby raising eco-feministic concerns.

The novel also illustrates ecofeminism through the lens of religious beliefs that are similar to patriarchal ideology, reinforcing the notion of male superiority over women within the societal framework. In the story, Christian individuals have their own expectations for women, which align with traditional gender roles that dictate what qualities make a good woman. Religious individuals feel uncomfortable when women go against their beliefs. *Vox* by Christina Dalcher demonstrates the rules enforced by religious individuals that lead to misogyny. Every man's leader is Christ, woman's leader is man, and Christ's leader is God the Great. Transitioning to chapter twenty-seven, it opens with essential insights from the book of Titus: "Instruct the young women to be sensible, to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, workers at home, kind, and subject to their own husbands" (*Vox* 42).

The quote suggests that the head of a woman is always a man, indicating that women cannot lead men in any aspect of society "because only Christ is the head of every man" (*Vox* 42). The sentence above discusses the importance of young women being sober, loving their husbands and children, and taking care of the household. In the novel *Vox* by Christina Dalcher, the religious individuals believe that it is important for women to remain at home and look after their families. This belief can result in misogyny when judging modern women, such as Jean, who takes on the role of leading the research team while also working. A different guideline is evident in the quoted passage from the novel, reflecting the women's rights with respect to their home and in religion; "We are called as women to keep silence and to be under obedience. If we must learn, let us ask our husbands in the closeness of the home, for it is shameful that a woman question God-ordained male leadership" (*Vox* 102).

The above quote discusses women and their understanding. Religious individuals in the book enforce a strict regulation regarding women's education. The quote specifies that women should remain quiet and compliant. If women need to acquire knowledge, they must seek guidance from their husbands. Women should rely on their husbands for support instead of seeking independence on their own. The majority of the female characters in Christina Dalcher's *Vox* are highly educated individuals like Jean, Jackie, and Lin. They attend college, earn

a degree, and secure employment. Jackie also takes on the role of an activist and advocates for the feminist cause. Women such as these individuals challenge conventions and trigger misogyny to reinforce traditional gender roles rooted in religious beliefs. Dalcher articulates the physical and psychological violence that women endure through the imposition of these metallic "shackles." These devices not only serve as a warning against any potential linguistic violations by women but also act as a true "torture device," causing pain and electroshock if women exceed the linguistic limits and regulations they are mandated to follow (*Vox* 55). This is clearly exemplified in the subsequent excerpt, where Jean describes the physical pain and trauma she experienced upon surpassing her word limit as highlighted: "My words flew out, unbridled, automatic. The room was filled with hundreds of them, all colours and shapes. Mostly blue and sharp. The pain knocked me flat. Our bodies have a mechanism, a way to forget physical trauma...I've blocked everything associated with that afternoon, everything except the tears in Patrick's eyes, the shock – what an appropriate term – on my son's faces and Sonia's delighted squeals as she played with the red device" (*Vox* 56). Within the framework of *Vox*, women's voices and opinions are systematically suppressed, permitting them to articulate only one hundred words each day. This restriction is enforced through a unique device worn on the wrists of women and girls, which is calibrated to recognise their specific vocalisations. If they surpass their word limit, the device delivers an electric shock. This system is analogous to the shock collars employed on dogs, which serve to remind them of their limitations when they venture beyond set boundaries. In this narrative, the prescribed role for women is one of silence and domesticity. As a result, girls are instructed exclusively in arithmetic, as they are expected to manage household duties and embody the role of a devoted wife (*Vox* 2). The acquisition of reading and writing skills is considered superfluous for girls, thereby silencing their voices, since those who learn to express themselves are more likely to become assertive women. The only literature sanctioned for women is the Bible, and even this is restricted to pink versions, implying modifications that inhibit the development of independent thought.

The memories recounted by Jean highlight the systemic physical violence directed at women, who are forced to endure painful lessons regarding the limited scope of their own speech and language. The representation of the "Electrocuted Female" evokes an image of a dehumanised figure, subjected to "unbearable pain" as a means of enforcing docility and obedience (*Vox* 64). From a Butlerian viewpoint, this cyclical representation not only compels women to internalise their subordinate societal roles but also normalises the violent treatment of female individuals. As a result, the female body is no longer regarded as a private entity but rather as an object controlled by the state. The combination of linguistic oppression and the physical violence symbolised by metal restraints denies women the fundamental right to govern their own bodies. Furthermore, the imposition of disciplinary control and the use of violence through metal wristbands reinforce the patriarchal and religious ideologies of the fictional totalitarian state.

Reverend Carl explains to Jean that the new "bracelets" are meant to "help put [women] in the mood, understand the fundamentals" (*Vox* 82). In the context of Foucault's theories, these "fundamentals" signify particular ideologies and established norms or "truths" that contribute to the formation of disciplined and submissive subjects. He asserts that power, characterized as "all the ways by which an entity gets another entity to do or to act in a certain way," is constructed through discursive knowledge: "Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; ... the means by which each is sanctioned" (Technologies of the Self 131). In this literary work, the black bracelets compel women to engage with a prescribed doctrine that seeks to establish a "truth" about their roles, effectively limiting their freedom and agency.

In the narration of *Vox*, women are compelled not only to carefully choose their words but also to regulate their thoughts, lest they should express them impulsively in moments of heightened emotion. If the societal dynamics depicted in *Vox* were to be transposed onto modern American culture, it could lead to the transformation of women into mere biological automatons. The silencing of women's voices strips away more than just their individual identities; it serves as a poignant reminder that the progress women have achieved is always at risk of being rescinded as if their ability to articulate their thoughts is a privilege bestowed by men. Through Jean's recollections, it becomes evident that she remains passive, opting not to participate in elections despite Jackie's admonitions, illustrating a lack of recognition for the struggles endured by women who fought tirelessly for rights that men received by mere birthright. The passage of the 19th Amendment was a significant victory for the Suffragettes, yet it would take several more decades for women of colour to gain consistent access to the ballot. As Jean shares her experiences, she expresses regret for her inaction, pondering whether earlier engagement might have altered the course of events.

The subsequent phase following the social segregation of women from men may involve a further division of women based on skin colour. If there were to be a regression in the rights that have been recognised and established, it would be logical to anticipate that the initial focus of such an assault would be on women's rights, subsequently followed by civil rights about race. The pivotal connection between these developments is exemplified in the landmark Supreme Court case, *Loving v. Virginia*, which invalidated the unconstitutional statutes prohibiting interracial marriages. Within the narrative, Jean encounters Sharon, a black woman married to Jean's white mail carrier, Del, with whom she has three daughters. Sharon raises a critical inquiry regarding the potential for the pure movement to categorise black and white individuals as fundamentally different. Her apprehensions extend beyond mere daily communication, as the inability to articulate her thoughts undermines her capacity to advocate for her family. Cecelia Ridgeway, a Stanford University professor and author of *Framed by Gender*, asserts that the primary obstacle to achieving gender equality is the prevalence of gender stereotypes rooted in both

individual and societal beliefs. I contend that these beliefs, particularly on the conservative end of the spectrum, are often deeply embedded in religious doctrines. Such ideologies typically position men as assertive and more qualified to hold power in economic and political spheres, while women are relegated to roles that emphasise domesticity and child-rearing. In the context of American society, men predominantly establish the norms, which frequently exclude the principle of equality for women. These dynamics highlight the ongoing struggle for gender equality and the necessity of challenging entrenched stereotypes to foster a more equitable society.

In conclusion, *Vox* emerges as a compelling dystopian narrative that illustrates a society rife with conflict, struggle, and the ongoing negotiation of societal boundaries. The novel highlights the political subjugation and oppression faced by women, who are compelled to adhere to traditional gender roles and the stringent regulations imposed by the government for their survival. The contention over language is deeply intertwined with the physical and psychological violence inflicted upon women, exemplified by the imposition of metal wrist restraints that curtail not only their speech but also their autonomy. The narrative places significant emphasis on the struggle for linguistic control, offering profound insights into the experiences of the protagonist, Jean, who gradually reclaims her voice while reflecting on her past and present circumstances. Consequently, the female body serves as a critical site of political conflict and power dynamics, as well as a space for self-transformation and agency. As Tiffany Atkinson articulates, the “complex materiality (of the bodies) makes them both readily confirm and, at the same time, potentially disrupt almost any dichotomy which culture thinks to impose” (*The Body* 5). Through its portrayal of the female body and agency, women’s science fiction and dystopian literature provide a poignant critique of contemporary political issues, urging readers to engage in critical reflection and advocate for a world free from all forms of violence.

### **Comparative analysis of *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison and *Vox* by Christina Dalcher in the Light of the eco-feminist point of view**

#### **Ecofeminist features in *The Bluest Eye***

Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* presents the story through the eyes of Pecola Breedlove, a young African American girl who absorbs the social beauty ideals entrenched in white supremacy. This perspective allows Morrison to delve into the complex interplay of race, gender, and class. Pecola’s aspiration for blue eyes epitomises her quest for love and acceptance in a society that privileges whiteness, where beauty is synonymous with being white, thus tying personal worth to racialised criteria. The narrative critiques the intersection of oppressive institutions, such as racism and sexism, which collectively inflict harm on both the physical body and the mental state, analysed from an ecofeminist viewpoint. Pecola’s fixation on blue eyes serves as a metaphor for the pervasive social forces that degrade and diminish an individual’s spirit. Additionally, the appropriation of nature, often symbolising beauty and purity in alignment with

white ideals, underscores how these oppressive systems shape the self-image of women, particularly Black women, leading to their dehumanisation.

#### **Domination of the Body**

The internalised racism experienced by Pecola results in her belief that her body lacks value, which further entrenches the perception of her as a secondary and expendable individual. Her aspiration to transcend her Blackness through the acquisition of blue eyes serves as a poignant illustration of the self-destructive effects of societal influences, highlighting a form of ecological violence. In this regard, the body is not only a site of ecological degradation but also a canvas for cultural imposition, especially for Black women who face systemic mistreatment and disregard.

#### **The Dehumanisation of Nature and Women**

The book articulates the objectification of Black women’s bodies, likening it to the exploitation and commodification of nature. The Breedlove family’s poverty is a direct result of a social, cultural, and physical context that has consistently marginalised them. Pecola’s neglect reflects a broader societal contempt for the environment and marginalised populations, suggesting that the same colonial and patriarchal motivations are at play in both the exploitation of nature and the objectification of Black women’s bodies.

#### **Healing and Restoration**

An ecofeminist analysis of healing in *The Bluest Eye* reveals significant insights. Despite the tragic fate of Pecola, the narrative suggests a potential for collective healing among female figures, notably Claudia and Frieda, which embodies an ecofeminist approach to resistance and the recovery of self-worth and identity. Within ecofeminism, healing is typically viewed as a dual restoration of the natural world and the human body, confronting harmful patriarchal systems.

#### **Ecofeminist aspects in *Vox***

The novel explores the ramifications of silencing women and curtailing their freedoms, which is central to its ecofeminist critique. The oppression of women in *Vox* can be seen as a direct assault on their bodily autonomy and their connection to nature, highlighting the idea that controlling women’s bodies equates to controlling society at large. From an ecofeminist viewpoint, the narrative reveals the dangers of ecological and societal collapse when women are deprived of their agency and voice. The enforced silence imposed on women transcends individual concerns; it mirrors a collective crisis, akin to the way the earth and its natural resources are rendered voiceless or neglected within patriarchal frameworks. The restriction of communication in *Vox* symbolises the broader marginalisation of women in environmental decision-making and the dismissal of their roles in both the creation and conservation of the world.

#### **Controlling and Silencing of Women’s Voices**

In ecofeminist theory, it is often emphasised that women’s viewpoints are essential in the struggle against both gender and



environmental injustices. In *Vox*, the suppression of women's voices is depicted in both literal and symbolic terms, which diminishes their autonomy. This situation mirrors the ecological damage that occurs when the perspectives of Indigenous women and other marginalised groups, who have long advocated for sustainable practices and ecological equity, are overlooked.

### The Body as Site of Domination

The narration reveals how women's bodies are regulated, both physically and politically, with constraints on speech signifying a more extensive control over women's autonomy related to their bodies. Within the realm of *Vox*, the body acts as a locus of ecological oppression, where the mere act of speaking is closely monitored. This scenario resonates with ecofeminist themes that address the regulation of women's reproductive rights, health, and liberties within patriarchal systems, paralleling the exploitation of the earth for profit and dominance by those in power.

### The Toxicity of Patriarchy

In the analysis presented by *Vox*, the government's policies are shown to be detrimental to both ecological systems and individual health. The suppression of women's voices can be regarded as a form of environmental pollution that undermines their mental and emotional well-being. The systemic misogyny illustrated in *Vox*, which seeks to convert women into silent and passive figures, inflicts harm on the environment in a manner comparable to the unchecked corporate power and exploitation that threaten ecological balance.

### Reclamation and Resistance

Marginalised women and environmental advocates confront oppressive systems, while the protagonist, Dr Jean McClellan, seeks to break this silence. The process of reclaiming one's agency and physical autonomy is intertwined with the broader desire to resist social and environmental decline. Jean's gradual restoration of her voice can be interpreted as an act of ecofeminist defiance.

### Themes of Oppression and Domination

*Vox* addresses the systematic marginalisation of women's voices within a patriarchal, dystopian framework, while *The Bluest Eye* focuses on the themes of racial and internalised oppression. Both narratives explore the subjugation and silencing of women, though they do so within distinct contexts. The objectification of Black women's bodies in *The Bluest Eye* and the suppression of women's voices in *Vox* exemplify the interconnectedness of patriarchal structures and environmental degradation.

### The Body and Nature as Sites of Control

The body functions as a site of racial and gender-based violence in *The Bluest Eye*, where Pecola's self-esteem is systematically undermined by beauty ideals linked to whiteness. *Vox* employs linguistic limitations to exert control over the body, thereby converting women's bodily autonomy into a tool for political domination. Both scenarios illustrate ecofeminist apprehensions

regarding the oppression of women and nature, as the body is perceived as an entity to be dominated and subjugated by patriarchal systems.

### Internalized vs. Externalized Oppression

In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola's internalised victimisation highlights the destructive effects of racism and sexism—two external societal forces—that culminate in her psychological breakdown and self-revulsion. On the other hand, *Vox* illustrates a form of external, physical oppression, where legislative and governmental actions aggressively curtail women's autonomy. Yet, both texts reveal a common theme: how patriarchal systems inhibit women's voices and diminish their agency, both from within and in the external world.

### Reclamation and Resistance:

Resistance is a central theme in both works, albeit expressed in unique ways. In *The Bluest Eye*, although Pecola's tragic story takes precedence, Claudia and Frieda embody forms of resistance against the oppressive standards of beauty. Conversely, Jean's eventual uprising in *Vox* highlights the importance of reclaiming personal agency and voice. Both narratives, despite their challenges, convey the notion that resistance and healing are possible, particularly through communal efforts and the rejection of detrimental patriarchal frameworks.

### Conclusion

Christian Dacher's *Vox* and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* serve as compelling critiques of social institutions, shedding light on the intricate relationships among gender, ethnicity, and power that shape women's experiences. This study analyses how these works demonstrate that the exploitation of marginalised communities and environmental harm is often linked to the oppression of women, particularly when viewed through an ecofeminist framework. A prominent theme in both *Vox* and *The Bluest Eye* is the intersection of gender, racial, and environmental oppression is elaborated. They illustrate how patriarchal systems dehumanise women while simultaneously exploiting the environment and the bodies of marginalised women. Ultimately, both stories stress the importance of reclaiming agency, whether by resisting systemic silencing or rejecting imposed standards of beauty, and they encourage a deeper comprehension of the vital connections between the struggles for environmental and gender justice. Both texts underscore the interrelated nature of various forms of oppression, illustrating that environmental subjugation and the oppression of women are not distinct phenomena but are, in fact, interconnected. These works demonstrate that ecofeminism advocates for a collective approach in combating both ecological degradation and gender-based violence. The struggles endured by the protagonists in *Vox* and *The Bluest Eye* serve as powerful reminders of the imperative to challenge oppressive systems that adversely affect both women and the natural world from an ecofeminist perspective that is portrayed in this study.

**Conflict of interest**

The manuscript is original, has been written by the stated author who are all aware of its content and approve its submission, has not been published previously, it is not under consideration for publication elsewhere, no conflict of interest exists, or if such conflict exists, the exact nature of the conflict must be declared and if accepted, the article will not be published elsewhere in the same form, in any language, without the written consent of the publisher.

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