

An Ecofeminist Analysis of Bruce King's Threads Ethel Nickle's Little Acre; Women as a Guardian of Land and Tradition

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Abstract: *This paper analyses Bruce King's Threads: Ethel Nickle's Little Acre through the lens of ecofeminism, focusing on the women characters as defenders of land and upholders of Native traditions. Ecofeminism as a theoretical framework reveals how these characters resist patriarchal forces and state authorities that seek to dispossess them of their cultural and ecological identity. Drawing on Vandana Shiva's Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development, and Carolyn Merchant's The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution, this study investigates the intersections of gender, environment, and indigenous resistance. The paper argues that the women's relationship with the land reflects a profound spiritual and cultural bond, positioning them as ecofeminist figures who challenge systems of oppression. By examining their roles, the paper highlights the broader implications of ecofeminism in understanding the cultural and ecological significance of land in Native American contexts.*

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Indigenous resistance, Native traditions, Women as land defenders, Patriarchal forces, State authorities, Cultural identity, Ecological identity

Introduction

Ecofeminism is a powerful interdisciplinary framework that examines the oppression of women and nature under patriarchal and capitalist systems. Rooted in feminist and ecological thought, this theory critiques the ways in which dominant authorities exploit both the environment and marginalized communities, particularly women. Vandana Shiva, one of the leading voices in ecofeminism, emphasizes women's unique relationship with the environment due to their historical roles in subsistence economies and their knowledge of ecological processes. As she notes in *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development* (1988), "Women and nature are associated not in passivity but in creativity and in the maintenance of life" (p. 47). Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature* (1980) similarly critiques the mechanistic worldview of Western thought, which has relegated both women and nature to subordinate roles.

A key aspect of ecofeminism is its emphasis on indigenous and local knowledge systems. It considers women as caretakers of land and tradition. Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, in their co-authored work *Ecofeminism* (1993), argue that the interconnected forces of capitalism and patriarchy undermine these traditional systems. They disrupt cultural and ecological balance. Ecofeminism seeks to recover and value these systems. It challenges exploitative paradigms and enhances the voices of women as

ecological protectors. The theory, thus, becomes a vital lens to explore the roles of women in indigenous communities, especially their connection to land, sustainability, and cultural preservation.

Bruce King's *Threads: Ethel Nickle's Little Acre* delves into the lives of Native American women. It portrays women's roles as custodians of both land and cultural traditions. The play's protagonist, Ethel Nickle, epitomizes the struggle to preserve ancestral land against external pressures from state authorities. Her "little acre" is not merely a plot of land but a symbol of her family's identity, history, and survival. Throughout the narrative, Ethel's connection to her land and her belief in storytelling as a cornerstone of Native American culture presents her role as a cultural guardian. She faces the pressures of Radcliff, Jussie, and Luellen, who are the representatives of the state. When they bring the police to force her evacuation, Ethel demonstrates unwavering resolve to protect her land.

The play further emphasizes Ethel's connection to ancient traditions through her interactions with the spirit of her late husband, Woods Green. These moments of spiritual union highlight her belief in the presence of her ancestors and the cultural practices they upheld. Native American lifestyles, as depicted in the play, reveal an intrinsic connection between land, spirituality, and identity. Women like Ethel Nickle, Birdie Hemlock, and Bluestone embody this connection. They serve as both protectors of their physical surroundings and of cultural memory. Vandana Shiva's assertion that "the marginalization of women and the destruction of biodiversity go hand in hand" (*Ecofeminism*, 1993, p. 5) aligns with King's portrayal of Ethel as a figure resisting forces that threaten both her land and her heritage.

By examining *Threads: Ethel Nickle's Little Acre* through an ecofeminist lens, this study seeks to uncover the intersections of gender, ecology, and cultural resilience in Native American literature. Ethel's resistance to external pressures reflects broader themes of ecofeminism, where women's roles as guardians of tradition and nature emerge as pivotal in the fight against cultural and ecological disintegration. This analysis highlights the critical importance of women's voices in sustaining and reclaiming indigenous identities in the face of systemic oppression.

Problem Statement

The exploitation of land and the subjugation of women are intertwined, particularly in indigenous communities, where women serve as stewards of both ecology and tradition. In Bruce King's *Threads: Ethel Nickle's Little Acre*, Ethel Nickle embodies ecofeminist principles by resisting patriarchal and capitalist forces to protect her land and cultural heritage. This study examines the play through an ecofeminist lens, exploring how it highlights the matriarchal role of Native women in resisting oppression and preserving ecological and cultural continuity.

Research Questions

1. How do the women in *Threads: Ethel Nickle's Little Acre* embody ecofeminist principles in their resistance against patriarchal and state forces?
2. In what ways does the land serve as a symbol of cultural, spiritual, and ecological identity for the Native people?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Ecofeminism as a theoretical framework emerged in the late 20th century. It connects the exploitation of women and the environment to patriarchal and colonial systems. Scholars have emphasized that ecofeminism not only critiques these systems but also celebrates the intrinsic relationship between women and nature, particularly in indigenous and marginalized communities. Native American literature offers fertile ground for ecofeminist exploration due to its deep connection to land, culture, and resistance. According to Qwatsinas (n.d.), "We must protect the forests for our children, grandchildren and children yet to be born. We must protect the forests for those who can't speak for themselves, such as the birds, animals, fish and trees".

Vandana Shiva (1988), one of the most prominent ecofeminist theorists, in her work *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development* asserts, “Women in subsistence economies, producing and reproducing wealth in partnership with nature, have been experts in their own right of holistic and ecological knowledge of nature's processes” (p.45). This perspective relates strongly with Native American literature, where women often act as custodians of ecological and cultural traditions. In *Threads: Ethel Nickle's Little Acre*, the female characters such as Ethel Nickle, Birdie Hemlock, Pants, and Bluestone embody this role. They resist state forces and protect their land. In her abovementioned work, Vandana Shiva (1988) critiques Western models of development, arguing that they prioritize economic growth at the expense of ecological and cultural sustainability. She highlights how these models exploit both women and nature, especially in traditional economies where women are central to the production and reproduction of ecological wealth. Shiva (1988) positions women as the primary custodians of ecological knowledge. She emphasizes women's role in sustainable practices and their holistic understanding of natural processes. Her work advocates for a shift from exploitative development practices to systems rooted in ecological harmony and equity.

Maria Mies, co-author of *Ecofeminism* (1993), further explores the interconnectedness of capitalism, patriarchy, and environmental degradation. She argues, “The violence against nature and women is not accidental but systemic” (Mies & Shiva, 1993). This systemic violence is evident in *Ethel Nickle's Little Acre*, where the state's attempt to dispossess the women of their land reflects a larger pattern of erasing indigenous and feminine agency. The women's resistance, therefore, can be read as a challenge to these intersecting oppressions. It emphasizes the ecofeminist idea that the liberation of women and the environment are inseparable. Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva (1993) connect the oppression of women and environmental degradation to the intertwined forces of capitalism and patriarchy. They argue that these systems commodify both nature and women. This act leads to exploitation and ecological destruction. The book critiques industrial and capitalist models. It proposes ecofeminism as a framework for creating equitable and sustainable societies. Mies (1993) emphasizes the importance of valuing traditional knowledge systems, particularly those practiced by women.

Carolyn Merchant, in her important work, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (1980), traces the historical roots of the domination of women and nature to the scientific and industrial revolutions. She notes, “The world we have lost was organic, interconnected, and female” (Merchant, 1980p. 45). This “organic” worldview is central to many Native American traditions, which often see the land as a living entity rather than a resource to be exploited. Carolyn Merchant (1980) explores the historical roots of the domination of both women and nature. She traces it back to the Scientific Revolution in Western thought. She argues that the rise of mechanistic and reductionist views of the natural world transformed it into a resource to be controlled and exploited, paralleling the subjugation of women. Merchant (1980) emphasizes the shift from an organic, interconnected worldview to one that legitimized domination and extraction. Her work critiques this legacy and advocates for recovering holistic and ecological perspectives that honor the intrinsic value of nature and women's roles within it.

In the context of Native American literature, ecofeminism provides a powerful lens to examine the roles of women as both protectors and nurturers. Paula Gunn Allen, a Native American feminist critic, highlights the centrality of women in indigenous cultures, stating, “For traditional tribal lifestyles, harmony with the land is essential, and women are the keepers of that harmony” (Allen, 1986, p. 45). Allen's insights highlight the importance of examining the role of women in Native literature as mediators between the community and the environment. The literature on ecofeminism provides a strong foundation for analyzing the roles of women in Native American literature. The works of Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies, Carolyn Merchant, and Paula Gunn Allen illuminate how women's relationships with land and culture can resist systemic oppressions.

METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMWORK

This research study is qualitative in nature, employing all available facts and information to evaluate the data and material required to answer the research questions. The study draws on both primary and secondary sources of data. The text of the play *Ethel Nickle's Little Acre* by Bruce King serves as the primary source of data collection, while critical analyses and research papers on ecofeminism, Native American literature, and relevant theoretical works have been used as secondary sources to support the interpretation of ideas. Textual analysis has been adopted as the primary technique for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data, allowing for a detailed exploration of the themes and characters within the play.

The theoretical framework for this study is rooted in ecofeminism, which bridges the interconnected oppressions of women and nature, particularly in indigenous contexts. Vandana Shiva, in *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development* (1988), expresses the relationship between women and ecological sustainability. She emphasizes that women are the preservers of the connection between nature and culture. Similarly, Maria Mies, in *Ecofeminism* (1993), highlights how patriarchal and capitalist systems exploit women and the environment. These ecofeminist perspectives serve as the primary theoretical lens through which the play is examined. They reveal how the female characters symbolize resistance to patriarchal forces through their defense of land and cultural traditions.

Another cornerstone of this framework is Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (1980), which situates the historical domination of women and nature within the rise of modernity and industrialism. Merchant's assertion that "The shift from a worldview in which nature was seen as a living, organic system to one in which nature was seen as a machine for human use was accompanied by the marginalization of women" (Merchant, 1980, p. 14), underscores the cultural and spiritual ties that women have with the land. This is one of the central themes in *Threads: Ethel Nickle's Little Acre* by Bruce King. This idea is further enriched by Paula Gunn Allen's insights in *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (1986), where she highlights women as keepers of harmony in indigenous cultures. She links women to the preservation of both ecological and cultural integrity. The methodology also considers the cultural specificity of Native American literature, which often portrays women as central figures in maintaining ecological balance and resisting dispossession. Textual analysis of *Threads: Ethel Nickle's Little Acre* focuses on how the characters and narrative structure embody ecofeminist principles, particularly through their resistance to the state's attempts to seize land. This analytical approach facilitates an understanding of how the play critiques systemic oppressions and advocates for the preservation of indigenous identity and autonomy.

By situating *Threads: Ethel Nickle's Little Acre* within the ecofeminist theoretical framework, this study aims to uncover the intersections of gender, ecology, and indigenous resistance, thereby contributing to broader discussions of Native American literature and the global relevance of ecofeminism. The works of Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies, Carolyn Merchant, and Paula Gunn Allen form the critical foundation for this analysis, providing a comprehensive lens to explore the symbolic and literal importance of land in the play.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Ecofeminism is a theoretical framework that examines the exploitation of women and nature under patriarchal and capitalist systems. This dual oppression is powerfully reflected in Bruce King's *Threads: Ethel Nickle's Little Acre*, where Ethel Nickle, the protagonist, defends her "little acre" as a symbol of identity, tradition, and spiritual connection. Vandana Shiva's assertion that "Women have been the custodians of biodiversity and have sustained the productivity and resilience of ecosystems through their knowledge and labor" (*Staying Alive*, 1988, p. 43), resonates deeply with Ethel's character. Her resistance to external pressures from Radcliff, Jussie, and Luellen, who bring the police to seize her land, symbolizes the ecofeminist critique of capitalist and patriarchal systems that prioritize exploitation over preservation. Ethel's struggle is not just about land ownership but about protecting a

way of life rooted in Native American cultural traditions, where the land is seen as a living and sacred entity.

The play further explores key ecofeminist concepts such as the spiritual and ethical connection to land, storytelling as cultural preservation, and the women's role as ecological protectors. Ethel's dialogues with the spirit of her late husband, Woods Green, illustrate a deep spiritual connection that reinforces the Native American worldview of interconnectedness. Additionally, her belief in the storytelling traditions of her people reflects the ecofeminist emphasis on indigenous knowledge systems, which maintain harmony between humans and nature. Alongside other female characters like Birdie Hemlock, Pants, and Bluestone, Ethel emerges as a guardian of the tradition. Through *Ethel Nickle's Little Acre*, King portrays women as central figures in the fight for ecological and cultural survival.

The following key concepts of ecofeminism can be found in the play:

1. Interconnection between Women and Nature

Ethel's "little acre" is not just a piece of property but a living representation of her family's history, identity, and survival. This significance is highlighted when Pants states, "I told them at the council that's her land out there, her family's. It ain't tribal trust or country or nothing. You think they would listen... no ears. Every damn one of them"(King, 2006, p. 03). Her frustration reflects the larger struggle against systems that commodify land while disregarding its cultural and spiritual significance to those who live on it. The council's refusal to listen mirrors the silencing of women like Ethel, who embody the role of caretakers and defenders of nature, as Vandana Shiva describes in her ecofeminist critique. The land's exploitation parallels the systemic oppression of women. Ethel's resistance thus symbolizes a broader fight to protect ecological and cultural integrity. Her struggle highlights the ecofeminist view that the liberation of women and the preservation of nature are intrinsically linked.

2. Land as a Living Entity

King's *Threads: Ethel Nickle's Little Acre* (2006) reflects the ecofeminist concept of land as a living entity. In the play, land is shown as deeply connected with identity, responsibility, and resistance. When Luellen questions Ethel's unwavering attachment to her acre, Ethel responds, "It is ... and you know it or you wouldn't be out here trying to claim it" (King 2006, p. 06). It emphasizes the intrinsic value of the land beyond material worth. This statement of the protagonist of the play shows the ecofeminist principle that the land is not merely property to be exploited but a source of life, culture, and spiritual meaning. Similarly, Ethel's declaration, "I haven't been away from here for more than fifty years" (King, 2006, p. 24), illustrates her profound, almost symbiotic relationship with the land. It embodies the ecofeminist belief in the interconnectedness between women and nature. The land represents her history, her family's legacy, and her very existence that makes it inseparable from her identity. The demonstrators' chant, "We shall not be moved. We will defend this one acre... we don't represent the land. We are the land" (King, 2006, p. 27), aligns with Vandana Shiva's (1988) assertion that indigenous and marginalized communities often view land as an extension of themselves. Their refusal to move reflects the ecofeminist critique of colonial and capitalist systems that commodify land and disregard its sacred role in sustaining life.

Ethel's other dialogues further reinforce her role as a steward of the land. When the policeman orders her to leave the land and run away, she says, "You get out of here. This is my land" (King, 2006, p. 28). This dialogue of Ethel highlights her defiance against external forces seeking to dispossess her of her connection to the land. This resistance is rooted in ecofeminist ideals of protecting life-sustaining systems from exploitation. In her conversation with Radcliff, she says, "This is your acre, Chunky. Yours, as long as you take care of the responsibility" (King, 2006, p. 21). This reflects an ecofeminist understanding of land ownership and the responsibility that follows it. The idea of responsibility underscores the reciprocal relationship between humans and nature, where care for the land ensures its ability to sustain future generations. This responsibility also ties to the cultural and spiritual significance of land in Native American traditions, where the land is revered as a living entity deserving of respect and protection. Through these dialogues, Ethel and the demonstrators embody ecofeminist resistance, affirming the sacredness of the land and rejecting systems that seek to alienate people from their natural and cultural roots.

3. Resistance Against Patriarchy and Capitalism

In *Threads: Ethel Nickle's Little Acre*, Ethel Nickle plays the role of a matriarch and a guardian of cultural identity. She challenges both patriarchal and capitalist systems. In her conversation with Luellen and Jussie, she says, "Both of you. I remember you as little girls, afraid of the world. You used to run and hide from cars on the road... My sister, your mother, gave you your Indian names... she ignited the search of the divine in both of you... I taught you your first Indian songs" (King, 2006, p. 09). In ecofeminist thought, patriarchal and capitalist structures often marginalize women and indigenous cultures, severing them from their natural and spiritual ties to the land. Ethel's reminiscence of teaching Indian songs and preserving the tradition of Indian names highlights her resistance to these systems by preserving and passing down knowledge rooted in indigenous spirituality and connection to nature. Vandana Shiva (1989) emphasizes that women, especially in indigenous communities, are the custodians of ecological and cultural heritage, and Ethel's nurturing of Luellen and Jussie reflects this role. By advancing their understanding of their cultural roots, she resists the erasure of indigenous identities and traditions, which capitalism and patriarchy often commodify or devalue.

Furthermore, Ethel's words critique the alienation imposed by these systems. She recalls a time when Luellen and Jussie were "afraid of the world". By reigniting "the search of the divine" in them, Ethel emphasizes a worldview that values spiritual interconnectedness and ecological harmony over domination and exploitation. This aligns with ecofeminist critiques, such as those by Shiva (1989), who argue that capitalist frameworks prioritize profit over life-sustaining relationships with the environment, thereby disenfranchising both women and nature. Ethel's insistence on teaching cultural practices acts as a form of resistance to these forces. She affirms the importance of cultural and ecological integrity. Through her actions and teachings, Ethel challenges the commodification of both women's roles and indigenous lands. This act of hers shows the ecofeminist vision that celebrates care, connection, and resistance to exploitative systems.

4. Spiritual Connection with Land

Threads: Ethel Nickle's Little Acre highlights the deep spiritual connection Native Americans, particularly women, share with the land, which aligns with ecofeminist principles. Ecofeminism emphasizes the interdependence of nature, spirituality, and identity. At one point in the play, Woods Green's spirit says, "They need to recognize the divine in all things. Most of all themselves" (King, 2006, p. 09). It reflects the indigenous worldview that sees the land as a living entity. The indigenous worldview challenges the Western capitalist paradigm that treats nature as a resource to be exploited. Ethel's response to Pants, "I am an old Indian. I am supposed to see and hear things," asserts the legitimacy of her spiritual experiences and the cultural knowledge passed down through generations (King, 2006, p. 11). This justifies Shiva's (1989) argument that indigenous women act as custodians of ecological and cultural heritage. They preserve life-sustaining relationships in the face of

patriarchal and capitalist systems. Ethel's ability to hear and see Woods Green reflects the idea that indigenous people especially women are deeply connected with spirituality and the ancestral land.

Ethel's statement, "There is no controversy. I live here. I belong to this land. If I leave, Woods will never be free. I'll die. That's all there is to it" (King, 2006, p. 12), conveys the idea that she and her land are inseparable. For Ethel, the land is not just property but a sacred space sustaining life, memory, and spirituality. As Shiva (1989) explains, indigenous women are often at the forefront of resisting the commodification of nature. They recognize the interconnectedness of human and non-human entities. Ethel's insistence on staying on her land, even when threatened by external forces, critiques the colonial and capitalist frameworks that alienate Native Americans from their spiritual and ecological roots. Her connection to Woods Green's spirit and the little acre symbolizes an ecofeminist understanding of land as a living entity, where the liberation of women and the preservation of the natural world are intrinsically linked. Ethel's resistance serves as a powerful ecofeminist act, defending cultural identity and ecological integrity against oppressive systems.

Ethel Nickle's spirituality can also be seen in her statement, "I don't live in a material world. You see these children? They are alive in my eternity. And that's right now. They are not real but they are alive" (King, 2006, p. 12). This shows her profound spirituality and her resistance to a materialistic worldview. For Ethel, the dolls that represent her deceased children, Louis, Melody, and Willow, are not just objects but spiritual extensions of her existence. This relation of her with the dolls symbolizes the eternal connection between the living and the dead in Native American spirituality. This worldview challenges the Western materialist perspective that equates value with physical reality. Instead, Ethel's belief in the spiritual presence of her children through the dolls reflects the indigenous understanding of life as cyclical and interconnected, where the spiritual and physical worlds coexist. By caring for these dolls as if they were alive, Ethel embodies the nurturing role of women in Native traditions, serving as a guardian of memory, continuity, and spiritual sustenance.

For Native Americans, especially women, spirituality is deeply rooted in their relationship with the unseen and eternal. Ethel's connection with the dolls aligns with the ecofeminist critique of a capitalist and patriarchal system that often dismisses non-material ways of knowing and being. Vandana Shiva (1989) argues that indigenous communities, particularly women, possess a holistic understanding of life that transcends the material. Ethel's acknowledgment of her children as "alive in my eternity" reflects this perspective, where spirituality is not confined to religious rituals but woven into daily life and relationships. Her care for the dolls symbolizes a refusal to relinquish her identity, history, and emotional connections. This spiritual relationship serves as an act of resistance against forces that dehumanize and commodify life. By maintaining this spiritual bond, Ethel asserts the enduring power of indigenous traditions, where life is defined not by physical presence but by its intrinsic connection to the eternal.

5. Storytelling as Cultural Preservation

Storytelling is an important aspect of Native American lifestyle. In the play, Ethel Nickle's narrative about the dolls and the witch's story exemplifies the profound role storytelling plays in Native traditions as a means of preserving cultural values, spiritual beliefs, and ancestral wisdom. According to Ethel, the dolls in her house are "transcended manifestations" that represent members of her family, tying them to deeper traditions and legacies. She recounts a story where "the witch hurts you through your children, and sometimes multiple generations suffer the debt" (King, 2006, p. 31). This storytelling not only sustains cultural memory but also teaches vital lessons about the consequences of actions and the interconnectedness of family, tradition, and nature. The witch's story reflects Native beliefs about power, sacrifice, and reciprocity. It emphasizes the spiritual and communal responsibilities that accompany personal or familial gains.

In continuing the tale, Ethel explains that “if a warrior wanted elevated hunting skills, vanity, he had a choice... one choice. Go to the witch” (King, 2006, p. 31). The warrior’s decision to seek the witch’s help required a grave sacrifice, “he had to give the witch a boy baby from his family” (King, 2006, p. 31). This exchange granted the warrior a charm that ensured successful hunts, provided he followed the witch’s instructions. The charm had to be “nurtured with tobacco and song,” reinforcing the Native principle of honoring spiritual connections through ritual and care (King, 2006, p. 31). If the instructions were ignored, the consequences were dire: “the men in the family would start dying young” (King, 2006, p. 31). This story demonstrates how Native storytelling conveys the importance of respecting traditions, maintaining harmony with spiritual forces, and understanding the lasting impact of actions on future generations.

Through Ethel’s storytelling, Bruce King captures the ecofeminist notion of interconnectedness, where the spiritual, cultural, and ecological worlds are deeply intertwined. The witch’s story teaches the need for balance between ambition and responsibility. It warns against greed and neglect of spiritual obligations. For Ethel, the dolls symbolize the weight of these stories and the traditions they embody. The dolls serve as a reminder of her duty to preserve and pass on these teachings. As an oral tradition, storytelling like Ethel’s connects individuals to their heritage and reinforces their roles within a larger community and ecosystem. In this way, Ethel demonstrates how storytelling functions as a powerful tool for safeguarding Native traditions, fostering continuity, and teaching ethical and spiritual values to future generations.

6. Ethic of Care and Nurturing Relationships

During the play, Ethel Nickle highlights the ecofeminist ethic of care by addressing Radcliff’s neglect of his responsibilities toward the land. She asserts, “You have a duty! This is your acre if you would take the responsibility. You got greed seeping into every part of you, just as bad as Louis had ghosts. You got ghosts too, but you won’t take care of it. All you can think about [is] Chunky Gaming Palace!” (King, 2006, p. 21). Ethel’s words highlight the importance of recognizing the land as a living entity that requires care and stewardship. It echoes the ecofeminist principle that nurturing relationships between humans and nature are essential to ecological and cultural well-being. Her critique of Radcliff’s greed reflects a rejection of the capitalist mindset that prioritizes material gain over the interconnectedness of life, a theme central to ecofeminist discourse.

Ecofeminist scholars, such as Shiva (1989), emphasize the role of women as custodians of ecological and cultural heritage. Ethel’s insistence on Radcliff’s duty to care for the land aligns with this perspective. It highlights the consequences of neglecting this responsibility. By comparing greed to “ghosts,” Ethel draws attention to the spiritual and moral decay resulting from disconnection from the land, which reinforces the ecofeminist belief in the sacredness of the natural world. Her words challenge patriarchal and capitalist systems. Her beliefs advocate for a return to nurturing relationships that honor the land’s intrinsic value and ensure its preservation for future generations.

7. Women as Guardians of Ecology and Tradition

Ethel Nickle’s words, “I am sorry. This is just so upsetting. Help me gather these ... see if we can fix this. ... always gathering shattered and broken things. Us women ... always trying to fix things ... lives ... dreams ... beliefs ... minds and bodies. Responsibility ... it can weary the toughest” (King, 2006, p. 29), reflects the ecofeminist view of women as guardians of ecology and tradition. Her statement captures the tireless labor of women in mending not only physical but also emotional and cultural fractures caused by systemic exploitation and neglect. The act of “gathering shattered and broken things” symbolizes the broader ecofeminist perspective, which positions women as caregivers tasked with restoring harmony to disrupted ecological and social systems. Ethel’s acknowledgment of the burden of responsibility highlights the emotional and physical toll borne by women as they attempt to repair the damages inflicted by patriarchal and capitalist forces on both human and natural

environments.

Ecofeminist theorists like Vandana Shiva (1989) argue that women, especially those in indigenous and rural communities, play a vital role in sustaining ecological and cultural traditions through their intimate relationship with the land and their nurturing roles within families and societies. Ethel's statement aligns with this perspective, as she embodies the struggle to preserve what remains of her community's values, beliefs, and connection to the land in the face of relentless pressures from external forces. Her words also reflect the resilience and strength required to fulfill this role, even as it becomes a source of exhaustion. By linking the act of gathering and fixing to broader responsibilities of caring for lives and traditions, Ethel highlights the interconnection between women's roles as nurturers and protectors of the environment. Her actions symbolize the ecofeminist principle that women are central to the preservation and restoration of ecological and cultural integrity.

In this dialogue, Ethel Nickle articulates the critical role of women in preserving tradition and cultural heritage, emphasizing the matriarchal structure of her clan. She says,

"Your ancestry is here. ... The bloodline runs through the women. The clan belongs to the women. That makes it my say! I say the women in our clan have to be soft and tough at the same time. They must be able to reprimand, encourage, and forgive. Perseverance. Little Miss. I am going to adopt you, not because you are my son's daughter, but because I can see these things in you. So, my blood will be yours" (King, 2006, p. 46).

This statement highlights the centrality of women in maintaining the continuity and resilience of cultural identity. By asserting that the bloodline and clan belong to women, Ethel underscores a matriarchal ethos where women hold the authority to safeguard traditions, guide future generations, and sustain the moral and spiritual integrity of the community.

Ethel's adoption of Bluestone, not merely as a biological act but as a symbolic transfer of responsibility and lineage, reflects an ecofeminist perspective that ties women's roles to the nurturing and perpetuation of cultural and ecological systems. Vandana Shiva (1989) points out that women are often the custodians of traditional knowledge and practices, serving as stewards of both the natural environment and cultural heritage. Ethel's recognition of the qualities of perseverance, forgiveness, and encouragement in Bluestone aligns with this perspective, as she entrusts the younger generation with the task of continuing the clan's traditions. This act not only reinforces the matriarchal structure but also reflects the ecofeminist belief that women are uniquely positioned to nurture and protect the interconnected systems of life, community, and culture. By claiming her authority as a matriarch, Ethel positions women as the linchpins of cultural preservation and resilience in the face of external challenges.

8. Liberation of Women and Nature from Exploitation

Ethel Nickle's actions toward the end of the play encapsulate the ecofeminist principle of liberation, tying the protection of land to the empowerment of women as stewards of ecological and cultural heritage. Her statement, "The charm is to be kept by a man in the family, but will be passed from one to the other by the women of the clan. If the responsibility is ignored, the power is unleashed, and the men die young" (King, 2006, p. 32), emphasizes the matrilineal role in safeguarding not just cultural symbols but the very fabric of familial and ecological continuity. The responsibility of passing the charm, and by extension, the land, is tied to the women of the clan. This signifies their pivotal role in nurturing and preserving life. This act of passing responsibility illustrates how women act as the intermediaries between nature, tradition, and future generations, highlighting the ecofeminist view that the liberation of women is intrinsically connected to the protection of the environment.

When Ethel declares, "You heard Woods, he is going to be coming for me. It is time you three keep this land. I am tired" (King, 2006, p. 47), and entrusts Bluestone, Pants, and Birdie with the

responsibility of protecting the land, she reinforces the concept of interconnected liberation. By transferring the guardianship of the land to these young women, Ethel ensures that the matriarchal tradition continues. Her action recognizes that Native women, as both nurturers and protectors, are uniquely positioned to resist exploitation and uphold the ecological and spiritual balance of their heritage. Her statement also signifies her acknowledgment of the physical and emotional toll that years of resistance have taken on her. Her vision symbolizes the necessity of collective effort in the struggle against patriarchal and capitalist exploitation.

CONCLUSION

Threads: Ethel Nickle's Little Acre by Bruce King serves as a clear exploration of ecofeminist principles. The play emphasizes the interconnectedness of women, land, and tradition. Through Ethel Nickle's character and her resistance against patriarchal and capitalist forces, King portrays the matriarchal power inherent in Native American culture. The play shows Ethel as a protector of the land, a custodian of family history, and a preserver of spiritual and cultural traditions. Her actions and words reflect the ecofeminist idea that the exploitation of nature parallels the oppression of women, as both are subject to systemic marginalization under patriarchal and capitalist frameworks (Shiva, 1989). By linking the land's fate to the women of her clan, Ethel highlights the indispensable role of women in nurturing, protecting, and sustaining both ecological and cultural heritage.

Ethel's storytelling, her spiritual connection with the land, and her symbolic passing of responsibility to Bluestone, Pants, and Birdie affirm the ecofeminist perspective that liberation is a collective and intergenerational effort. As Vandana Shiva (1989) asserts, "women are uniquely positioned as guardians of ecological balance and cultural continuity" (Shiva, 1988, p. 41). Ethel's matriarchal leadership exemplifies this role. Her dialogue about the charm, the dolls representing her children, and her final act of entrusting the land to the next generation all embody the ecofeminist ethic of care and responsibility. These moments in the play demonstrate how Native traditions, particularly storytelling, serve as tools of empowerment and resistance, preserving the spiritual essence of the land and fostering resilience against external forces of exploitation.

In conclusion, *Threads: Ethel Nickle's Little Acre* not only dramatizes the ecofeminist struggle for harmony between humanity and nature but also celebrates the centrality of women in this endeavor. Through Ethel's leadership, King illustrates that matriarchy, rooted in nurturing relationships and spiritual wisdom, is integral to resisting environmental degradation and cultural erasure. The play answers the research questions by showcasing how Native women, as stewards of land and tradition, embody ecofeminist ideals and confront the challenges of patriarchy and capitalism. Ultimately, King's work serves as a testament to the power of women to uphold ecological and cultural integrity, ensuring that both the land and its stories endure for future generations.

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