

**A STUDY ON GYNOCENTRISM IN TERRY MCMILLAN'S *THE
INTERRUPTION OF EVERYTHING***

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ABSTRACT

African American women writers are the real representatives of the black women living in America. They depict the accurate real life occurrence of black women through their fictions. The main aim of the twentieth century African American women writers is to disintegrate the mistaken belief about black women. The bitter past of these women writers force them to deal with the day-to-day experiences of a black woman in their novels. In the specific history of African American fiction Terry McMillan has a distinctive place for herself because of her portrayed of interpersonal relationships in her novels. Unlike other writers who give priority to racism or any other issues which are common in African American Literature, she surveys current issues such as single parenthood, dissolution, sexual abuse and drunkenness. The depiction of motherhood and friendship play an important role in McMillan's novels. As female bonding gives protection, development, comfort and emotional support, McMillan's women characters confide on their female friends. It is also unavoidable and necessary for black woman because of the boundless deficiencies of the Black men. The representation of

imperfection, weakness, attitude and character in the black men are factual for they are not only ready to sacrifice anything but also fail to support or praise their women's dedication and devotion for the family. This paper investigates the issues faced by the protagonist Marilyn Grimes in Terry McMillan's novel *The Interruption of Everything* as a wife, mother, sister and daughter-in-law in the family in contrast to the insufficiency of her spouse.

Key words: single parenthood, motherhood, female bonding, insufficiency, imperfection.

Terry McMillan's novels are exceptionally rewarding because of her portrayal of the city experiences of African American women and men. Her novels deal with the issues such as constant search for love, single parenthood, career development through intimacy, forbearance and liveliness. The female characters of Terry McMillan expose their longing to have a well matched companion. Apart from giving happy ending to her fictions she prefers incorporating comical aspects for delineating significant issues which reveal her originality. In McMillan's novels, women are the facilitators for themselves. Though her male characters are not remarkable, they are the main cause for the problems of women. McMillan emphasizes not only the sufferings of women but also deals with the theme of mid-life crisis. She depicts her female characters as victimizers and conquerors.

Terry McMillan's *The Interruption of Everything* depicts the problems of the protagonist Marilyn Grimes, who works at a craft store. She possesses a loveless marriage, a demanding family and unfulfilled dreams. She is the mother of three grown-up kids with her husband Leon, mother-in-law Arthurine, her drug-addicted foster sister Joy and her own mother. While portraying McMillan's female characters who have been locked under the chain of commitments called marriage, Bonnie Kreps states, "Little girls are all too often dressed to be 'ladylike'-in other words, they are dressed to be pretty objects, like dolls. Whereas boys are encouraged to be rough, tough and aggressive, girls are trained to become timid and docile" (46). As a wife, mother and daughter-in-law she fulfils the need of everyone in the family except hers. Her unexpected pregnancy with Leon makes her to miscarry it as she runs forty. She is worried because of her sister Joy's drug addiction and spending good times with her boyfriends without bothering about her two children and her mother. In addition, her mother-in-law Arthurine's contact with her boyfriend Mr. Prezelle and Marilyn's oldest son Spencer's arrival with his girlfriend Brianna who is two years elder than him, increase her stress to the maximum. When Marilyn informs the matter about her son to Leon, he casually tells Marilyn that he is going to leave her as he is bored with her. He also says that, as he has been married earlier he has missed his sweet period that can not be done then as his children

have grown big. When Leon tries to console her by intimating that he leaves for a girl who is half her age, Marilyn shouts at him by saying, “Leon, if you don’t get out of this house in the next ten minutes, I’m going to do something I might regret” (152). Next she gets the news of her sister Joy’s death due to an accident and her son Simon who has broken his wrist and has undergone a surgery. Now Marilyn has been pushed under additional commitment as she has to look after her sister Joy’s two children as well as her own mother. So wherever she turns she faces problems in different angles. In spite of the repeated problems Marilyn tries to balance her family, her sister and mother. Her friends are her best pain-relievers at the back of every difficult situation. She does not give importance to her hopes and desires as she gives prominence to her family.

After the innumerable struggle in the family Marilyn comes to know how far she has been a halfwit for her family members who are not ready to support or praise her sacrifice. As McMillan’s female characters are audacious and independent, they always want to sustain their identity. When Leon deserts Marilyn’s life she immediately wants to have a change to relieve herself from the stress by participating in various activities including yoga. Her desire in reconstructing her life forces Marilyn to get angry to Leon by saying “I have done anything except be your wife and raise kids for the last twenty-two years. . . I think it’s time for me to do something just for myself” (149-50). Though McMillan’s protagonists come across numerous problems, they are bold enough to tackle the complicated situations as they prefer moving to the next better option. While describing Terry McMillan’s way of depiction, David Nicholson in his review states, “relationships between black men and black women as something more than the relationship between victimizer and victim, oppressor and oppressed” (6). As Marilyn feels that she has wasted her entire life in taking care of a big family, she is very particular that she should lead a desirous as well as hopeful life after her husband Leon has left her.

Even in her pathetic state Marilyn feels and cares for her foster sister Joy by giving comfort to her when she suffers from Hepatitis C and Pancreatitis. Her concern towards her sister can clearly be proved when Marilyn takes care of Joy’s children like her own children which looks strange to them as they have never received the same from their own mother. She provides them everything apart from teaching them to pray. While describing the significance of sisterhood, Katrina Bell McDonald states, “The Sisterhood in the black tradition was founded upon a principle of mutual respect for all black women, who regardless of the quality of their personal and social attributes, were equally deserving of the

opportunity to move forward and equally important to the survival of the race” (53). Friendship plays a significant role in McMillan’s novels. In this novel Marilyn shares everything with her best female friends Paulette and Bunny. When she tells about her unsuccessful married life to her friends, Paulette says, “Marriage requires cooperation and compromise and patience. As soon as you’re not willing to do that you both lose” (27). Marilyn feels that she must be gifted to have such a friend who identifies not only her problems but also consoles her in complicated situations which acts as a universal remedy and gives her enormous sustenance. Though Marilyn is locked under household duties she never fails to meet her friends once in a month which gives her extreme happiness and relaxation.

McMillan’s men are generally imperfect and not good at psychological, cordial, economical and sensual aspects. They do not bother about deserting the life of their women by evolving extramarital relationships. Marilyn’s husband Leon does not want to come under the family commitments and he wants to be away from Marilyn. Similarly Marilyn knows that her life has become spoiled and so she prefers to have a new life through some changes, but she is not able to endure the statement of her husband that he is bored with her. While devaluing men’s behaviour, Paulette states, “Men are just so predictable. This shit must be their rite of passage to middle age or something because they all seem to go little nuts after they hit their forties” (158). Even Marilyn’s mother-in-law Arthurine understands her situation and advises her son by saying, “She gives right here in this same house with you. You wouldn’t have to catch a plane nowhere that was five thousand miles away” (353). Through Arthurine’s lover Prezelle, McMillan has delineated the qualities to be maintained by a black man. In his conversation with Arthurine, Prezelle tells, “All a man needs to do prove he’s a man is work hard. Take care of his family. Pay his bills on time and try to be a good father. A good husband. That’s all there to it. You don’t have to go anywhere if you already doing right where you are” (124). Hence McMillan clearly focuses the weakness of Leon and pinpoints the common faults of black men.

The absence of common primary qualities of McMillan’s men make them scanty and this can be clearly proved in their actions like inflexibility, egocentric, quitting responsibilities, being illogical and wavering in every single thing, misusing the partner bodily and inwardly, maintaining duplicate relationships, not pellucid in money matters, abandoning the wife for a white, habituated to narcotics and alcohol. McMillan’s women are family oriented whereas her men are free from commitments. In order to reveal their original selves, she wants her

women characters to treat themselves better as they need not depend on their irresponsible men. Maintaining dignity is unobtainable and unachievable for men, they prefer satisfying themselves in sexual activities and misdeeds without minding how far they give havoc on themselves, their family and also on every side. The suffering of men from the community-based tautness and the absence of commitments to the family make them not only distance themselves in their children's lives but also to leave the family in certain situations. Their inefficiency and low self-confidence develop fear in them to choose the partner and sustain a long-term relationship. As McMillan never supports her protagonists' shelter in the clutches of men and suffer, she portrays the female characters as courageous and independent to overcome the torments as they are capable of maximum pliancy, tolerance, confidence, devotion and surrender. Thus in this paper, an analysis has been done on the issues of the protagonist Marilyn Grimes as a wife, mother, sister and daughter-in-law with the deficient partner.

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