

Abstract

Terror, Revelations and Wilderness in *A Mercy* by Toni Morrison

Set in the seventeenth century, in *A Mercy*, American novelist Toni Morrison presents “a kind of family” (183) formed by characters of different religious, national and ethnic backgrounds. However, despite successful moments of attachment, affiliation and solidarity, the members of this group fail to remain together. Although Morrison brings attention to the existence of communities whose histories have been “omitted or repressed by the discourse of American exceptionalism” (Karavanta 725), this alternative mode of kinship might seem impossible.

Nevertheless, I propose that the disintegration of the community does not disallow the value of support and cooperation among its members. Using concepts from feminist theology, I argue that *A Mercy* is composed by a series of forms of revelation, defined as an instance where God makes herself known to us¹.

Several authors such as Mara Willard, Justine Tally and Shirley Stave have studied the connections between Morrison’s work and Christian religions. Although all three authors have used fundamental notions from theology to read the novel, none of them have elaborated on the concepts of “revelation” or “works of mercy.”

Feminist theology locates revelations in women’s experiences, and they range from every day to uncommon occurrences (Hilkert “Experience” 60). In the novel, the relationships of spirituality, friendship, motherhood, and mercy among the female

characters are revelatory. Also, within tradition of African American slaves, for Florens, the wilderness is a site for mercy and revelation.

Finally, feminist theology not only retrieves teachings from the Scriptures, it condemns the moments of irredeemable violence and patriarchy in them. Therefore, by following this methodology, I also consider the reality of oppression portrayed in the novel.

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Following Johnson, I employ the traditional term “God” with female pronouns (43).